

How to Conduct Open-Source Research on the Russian Internet



About This Guidebook

This research project by Aric Toler, a contributor at RuNet Echo and Bellingcat, offers a series of guides, tutorials, and walkthroughs on understanding and conducting open-source research on the Russian-language Internet (RuNet). The primary focus of the project is providing instruction on the nuances of Russian-language research relating to the conflict in eastern Ukraine by using contemporary case studies. To show how these methods are useful in other conflicts, this project will also explore some similar open-source work being done on the Syrian conflict. The finished product will help readers learn how to understand and conduct such research.

There are more Internet users in Russia than any other European country, yet there are no detailed guides or tutorials available to guide non-Russian speakers on navigating the wealth of open-source information on the RuNet. Many, if not most, of the guides will be accessible to those with little-to-no Russian skills, giving non-Russian speakers the tools and confidence to access information on the RuNet.

The project helps researchers, journalists, and anyone interested in understanding more about the Russian Internet to verify sources and understand information found on Russian social media. It also provides some techniques for media forensics involving images and videos, including the different levels of verification needed for different uses: journalistic, evidentiary, as well as other avenues.

The motivation for carrying out this project is to satisfy a demand among English-speakers for learning materials about carrying out and verifying open-source research on the RuNet. There is a wealth of information on the RuNet that is of interest to specialists, journalists, and the general public in the English-speaking world. There are currently no guides, however, that provide instruction for navigating and verifying these sources that differ from English-language counterparts. Important sources for research data include

exclusively Russian-language social networks like Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, along with others that function in Russian-language pockets on Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and elsewhere.

Open-source research can complement traditional journalism by generating leads and supplementing on-the-ground reporting. For example, the author of this project, Aric Toler, provided open-source research on a particular Russian soldier who fought in Ukraine to VICE News journalist Simon Ostrovsky to assist him in following his “journey” from his hometown to the battlefields of Ukraine (see “[Selfie Soldiers: Russia Checks Into Ukraine](#)”). In another example, open-source research from Bellingcat into the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 provided material for a [60 Minutes Australia investigation](#) at the site of the tragedy.

Each installment of RuNet Echo’s guidebook includes a detailed tutorial, accompanied by case studies, teaching readers how to conduct a particular kind of open-source research.

How to Conduct Open-Source Research on the Russian Internet

- [So You Want to Conduct Open-Source Research](#)

These general instructions address specific ways to assess the reliability of photographs, videos, and human sources, with a special focus on the Russian Internet.

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- [What You Need to Know About Russian Social Networks to Conduct Open-Source Research](#)

Outside of the familiar English-language social networks of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others, there is a handful of social media platforms used either exclusively or primarily in the post-Soviet world.

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- [Want to Research the Russian Internet But Don't Speak Russian? We Can Help.](#)

Conducting open-source research is especially challenging when you don't speak the language of your research topic. Thanks to the Internet, however, even these obstacles don't make it impossible.

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- [Unearthing Local Stories on the Russian-Language Internet](#)

While a lot of open-source research on the RuNet is possible thanks to broad Internet searches, sometimes it's best to drill down to the narrowest sources available.

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- [Herein Lie the Secrets of Geolocation](#)

This guide will provide instruction on using satellite images, with a focus on historical imagery, and available street-level imagery accessible for Russian and Ukrainian cities.

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- [Triangulating Sources to Thin the Fog of War](#)

Even with the flood of information created and made accessible by the Internet, the fog of war is still thick. But it's not impenetrable.

page 47

- [How to Comb Russia's TV News](#)

This guide explains how to evaluate Russian TV news sources and navigate television networks' online video archives, in order to compare coverage of specific events.

page 53

- [How to Learn More About the Big Wigs and Public Officials in Russia and Ukraine](#)

There are numerous free and open information portals and databases available for researching individuals in Ukraine and Russia, whether you are investigating a public figure or a private individual.

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- [You've Read Our Open-Source Research Guidebook. Now Let's Use It.](#)

This ninth and final entry takes the tools and instructions we've been studying and applies them to a single case study: last year's wildfires in the Siberian city of Chita.

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What we do: [Global Voices](#) reporters cover how citizens use the Internet and social media to make their voices heard, often translating from and to different languages.

So You Want to Conduct Open-Source Research



“Dreaming” by a4gpa. October 3, 2009. CC 2.0.
Edited by Kevin Rothrock.

Before diving into the specifics of investigating open-source data on the RuNet (Russian-language Internet), it's useful to understand the general verification processes that are applicable to all sources of open-source intelligence (OSINT). For a comprehensive treatment of the verification of digital open-source intelligence, you may want to see the [Global Voices social media verification guide](#) or the [Verification Handbook](#), written by journalists

from a variety of traditional media outlets, such as the BBC, and emerging projects, like Storyful.

These general instructions address specific ways to assess the reliability of photographs, videos, and human sources. While most of the advice applies to any area, we focus specifically on Russian-language evidence and sources.

Contents

- [Photos](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Vetting Sources](#)

Photos

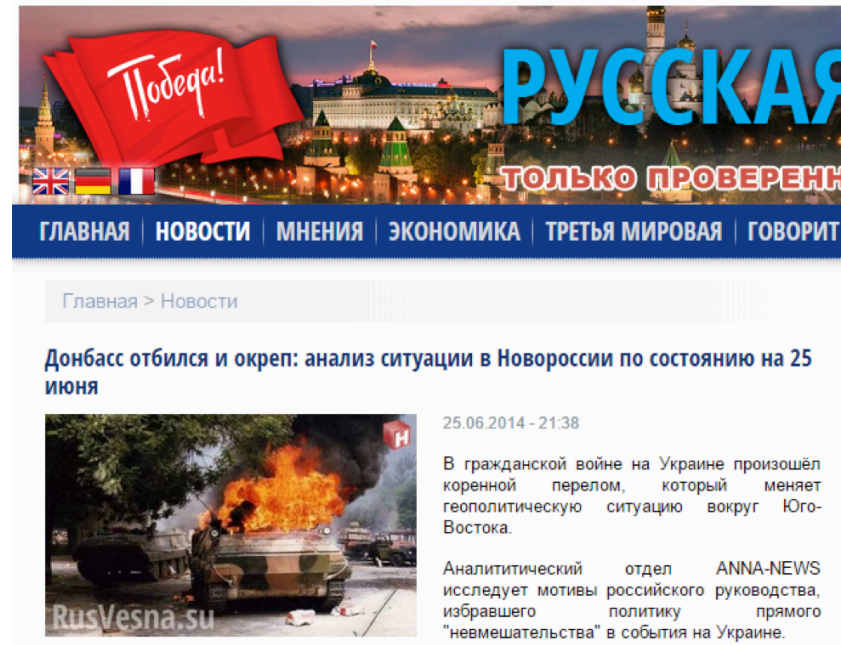
There are countless ways to verify an image, depending on the various elements of the source. One of the most common ways to verify a photograph is by geolocating the image, which involves confirming or rejecting a photograph's location by matching visible elements to outside sources, such as road signs, topographical features, and landmarks. Another way to verify claims about an image is to verify the time that it was taken, either through seasonal differences (for

example, is snow visible in a photograph supposedly taken on the day after reports of heavy snow?) or specific times, by measuring observable shadows. These two verification methods—geolocation and “temporal” location—will be covered in extensive detail in a future installment of this series.

As detailed in the two broad verification guidebooks cited in our introduction, the quickest way to verify a photograph’s uniqueness is by conducting a reverse Google Image Search or a TinEye search. Let's take a couple of Russia and Ukraine-specific examples to verify media content through these reverse image searches.

As described by [StopFake](#) and other outlets, several pro-Russian and separatist media outlets have used decades-old photographs to depict what they claim are recent events in the the war in eastern Ukraine. For example, in the below article on the pro-separatist website RusVesna.su (meaning “Russian Spring”), a photograph of military equipment on fire is juxtaposed with a story about fighting in eastern Ukraine on June 25. The photograph is presented without context, and two

logos are plastered onto it, including the Web address of RusVesna.su, implying that the site’s photographers recorded the image themselves or hold the rights to the photograph.



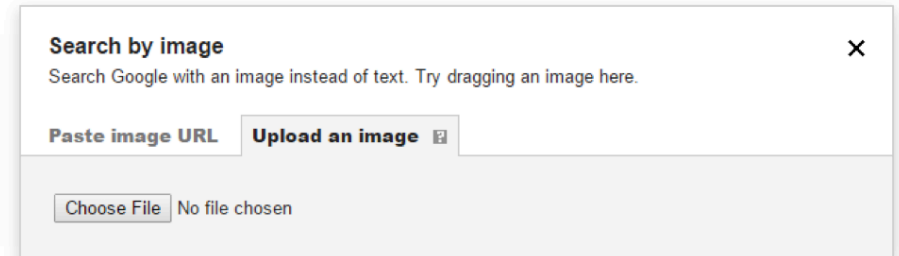
This photograph, as many have pointed out, is actually from Tiananmen Square in 1989. A reverse Google Image search of this image will reveal this fact, when the search dates are restricted to resulted published before the Ukrainian conflict.

How do you conduct such a search?

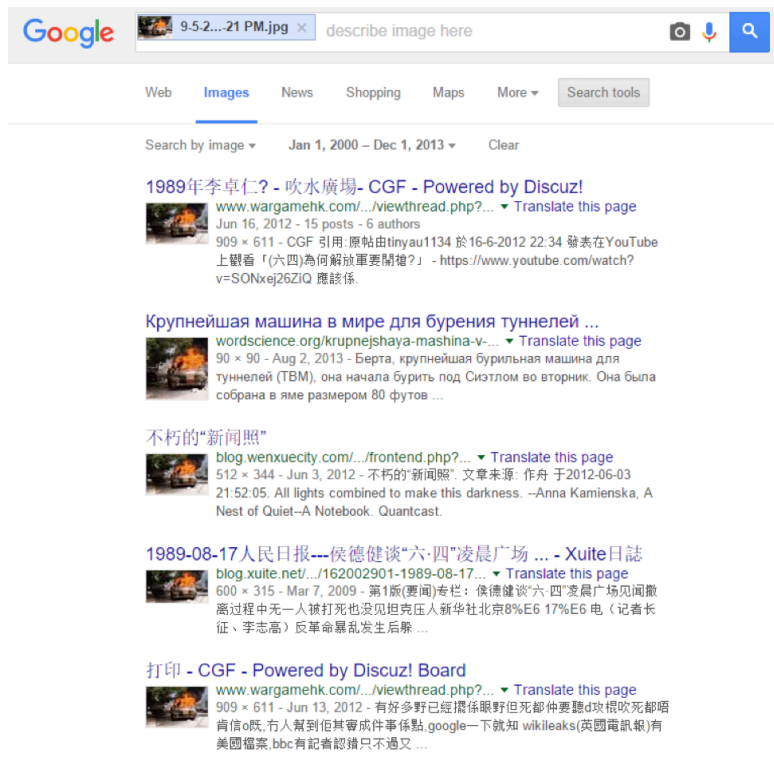
Go to images.google.com, and click the camera icon, in order to search by image:



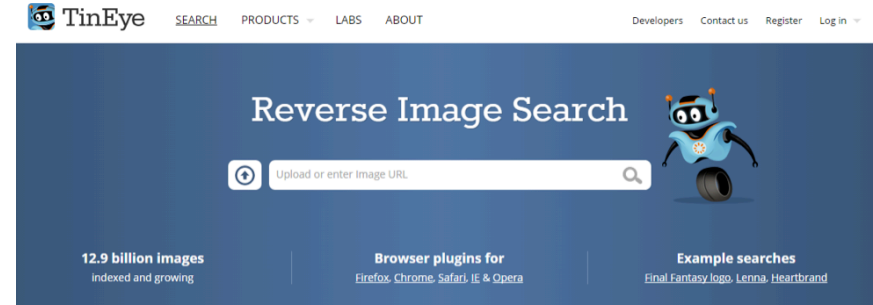
You may need to take a screenshot of the photograph you want to search. Either upload the photograph (a screenshot or the actual saved file will both work) or enter a URL that directly leads back to the image file (such as .jpg, .gif, .png—just not the entire webpage that hosts the image). When conducting a reverse image search, be sure to find the highest resolution copy available, as it will bring the most results.



After modifying the search's date parameters, it becomes clear that this image likely comes from China and appeared online before the conflict in eastern Ukraine.



TinEye works roughly the same as a reverse Google Image Search, but will usually return fewer results. The mechanisms are the same as Google Image Search, where you can either upload an image file or provide a URL.



There are various free tools that will analyze a photograph's metadata and compression information, allowing further verification of an image's veracity. The results are not always clear, however, and depend on the copy of the file uploaded. For example, a JPEG that has been resized, recompressed, and changed from the original file will have much less reliable data than the original full-resolution image recorded by a camera. Still, if you would like to try to analyze an image through ELA (error-level analysis) or its metadata, visit indexif.com, fotoforensics.com, and l Zitru.

Instead of digital forensic tools, you can also rely on the naked eye. The easiest way to detect a Photoshopped image is by examining an image's shadows and reflections. [The Moscow](#)

[Times](#), [StopFake](#), and many others have noted that Russia's Investigative Committee used a Photoshopped image of Donetsk in flames on the cover of a book entitled *The Tragedy of Southeast Ukraine*. When examining this image—which was also used in [a news article on the site Politnavigator.net](#)—it is clear that the reflections in the water are incorrect.



The incorrect reflections in the water are evident across from the rising flames, especially the leftmost column of fire and smoke. Note how a building is reflected in the water beneath the leftmost flame, while the fire is not. As discovered by [StopFake](#), the flames were artificially added to [a normal picture of the Donetsk cityscape](#).

Just as with many hoaxes in the English-language corners of the Internet, a simple reverse Google Image Search or critical eye can stop many falsehoods in their tracks.

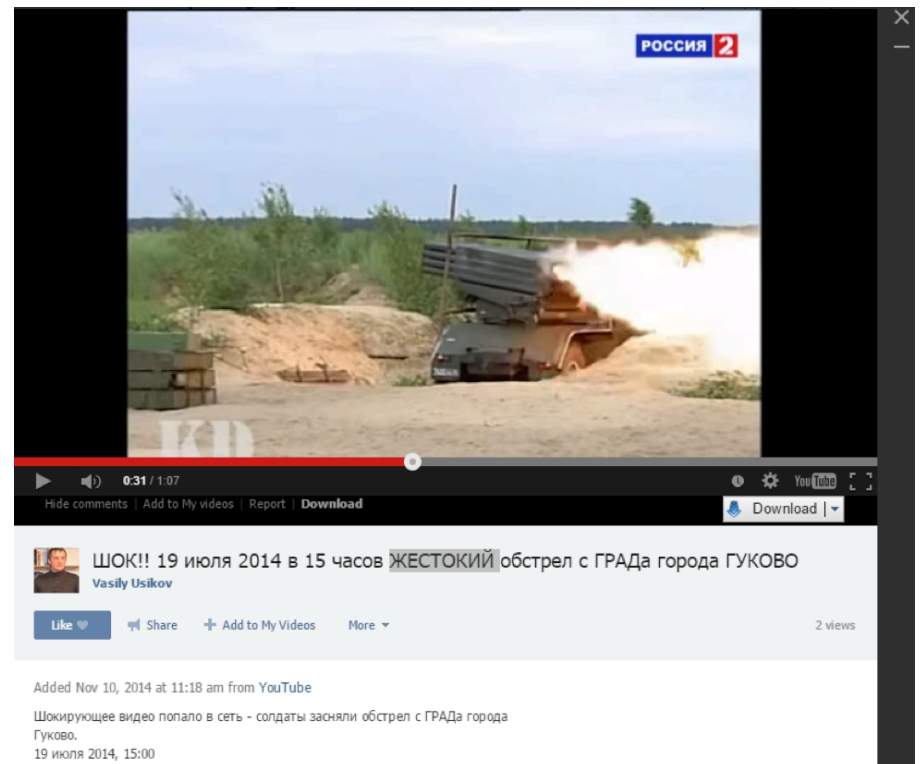
Videos

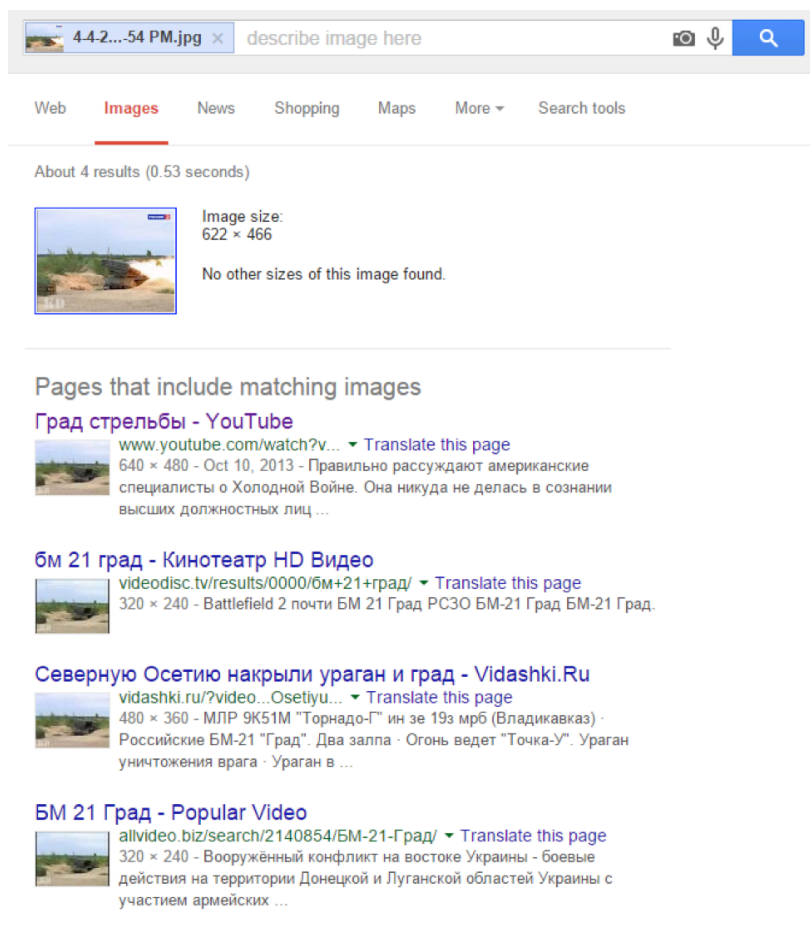
Unlike images, there are no services available for reverse video lookup. This means that when you find a video, there is no fast solution for verifying its original source. However, there are still ways to carry out a reverse-verification of a video to see if supposedly new evidence is actually rehashed material.

The closest thing to a reverse video search is by capturing a screenshot of the video at a particular moment, and then conducting a reverse Google Image search of that screenshot. Additionally, you can take a screenshot of the video's thumbnail and reverse search it, hoping to find a copy of the video elsewhere on YouTube or another video hosting service. A more detailed description of how YouTube generates its thumbnails can be found [here](#).

[This video on Vkontakte](#), Russia's most popular social network, is titled “SHOCK!! July 19, 2014 at 3pm, a BRUTAL shelling from a GRAD of the city of Gukovo.” The video, posted on July 19, 2014, is apparently from Russian state television channel Rossiya 2, and shows soldiers loading missiles into a Grad multiple launch rocket system and firing them. Without any specific identifying features, it is hard to verify the time, location, and original source of this video based on context clues alone. However, by taking a screenshot of particular moments in the video, we can find the original video source.

The best places to take screenshots are the very beginning and very important or unique moments. The first video frame does not return any helpful results, but a screenshot of the moment of the missile launch yields multiple search results:





Following the first link gives us [a video uploaded in October 2013](#) of Russian soldiers conducting training exercises in 2009 with the Grad multiple-launch rocket system. Clearly, this video does not show Ukrainian soldiers shelling Russia on July 19, 2014, as the original user claimed.

Once you verify that a video is unique, the location and time of the photograph should be verified to greatest extent possible. In April 2015, wildfires ravaged much of Siberia, including the region known as the Zabaykalsky Krai. A video emerged on [YouTube](#) and Russian social networks, including [Odnoklassniki](#), showing a hellish scene of cars driving through thick smoke. Reverse image searches did not reveal any duplicates of this video after it was posted on April 14, meaning this video could not be verified debunked using this method alone. The time stamp on the video itself checks out, showing April 13, 2015; however, this information could be modified or digitally added, and is thus not a reliable means of verification. An inspection of the license plates in the video showed that the code was 75 (top right, after HK):

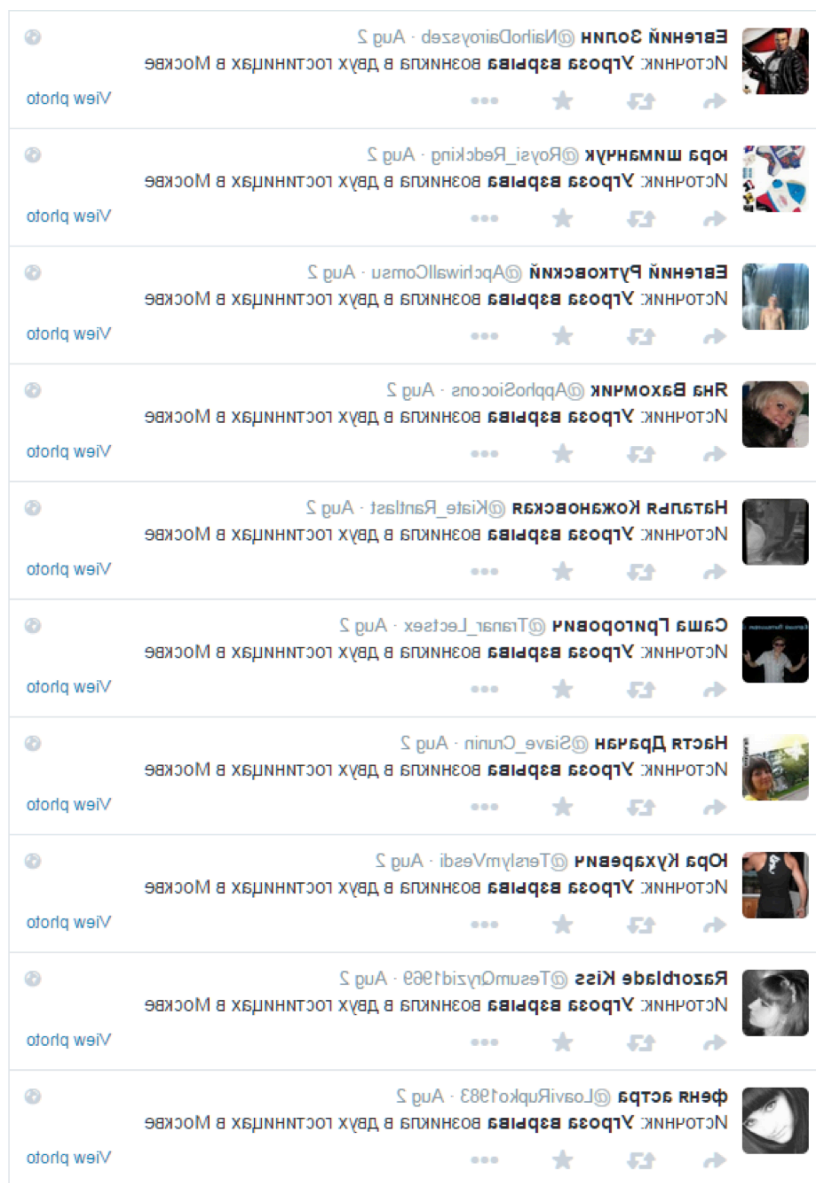


Cross-referencing [the license plates codes in Russia](#) shows that this code is indeed local to the Zabaykalsky Krai, lending additional credibility to the video. Additionally, the user who uploaded the video to YouTube has [one other upload from months before the wildfire video](#)—a local news broadcast segment for Khakassia, located not far from the Zabaykalsky Krai. With all of these factors combined, there is no open-source information available that leads us to think this video was fabricated or falsely represented.

Vetting Sources

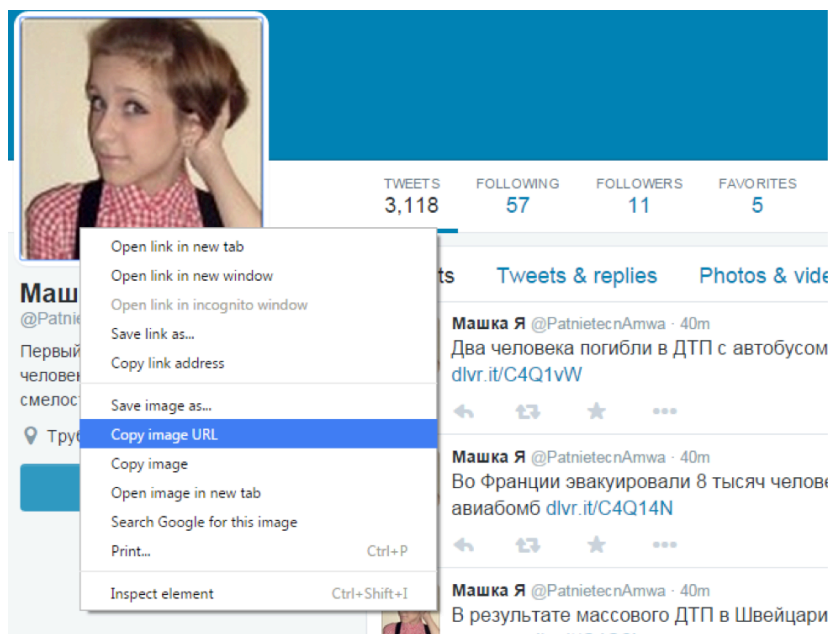
Verifying the reliability of sources on social media is not too different on the RuNet than it is with the rest of the Internet, but there are some special considerations one should make. While there are a number of “bots” that send out identical tweets in every language, there is an especially large concentration of them on Twitter writing in Russian. This trend is particularly true with politicized events, as both pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian headlines are spammed across hashtags and keywords, making open-source investigation more difficult.

In the screenshot below, we see that an identical tweet has been sent by dozens of Twitter bots at the same time. The tweet reads “A source says a bomb threat has been called in at two hotels in Moscow,” with a number of people with generic Russian names spreading the information.

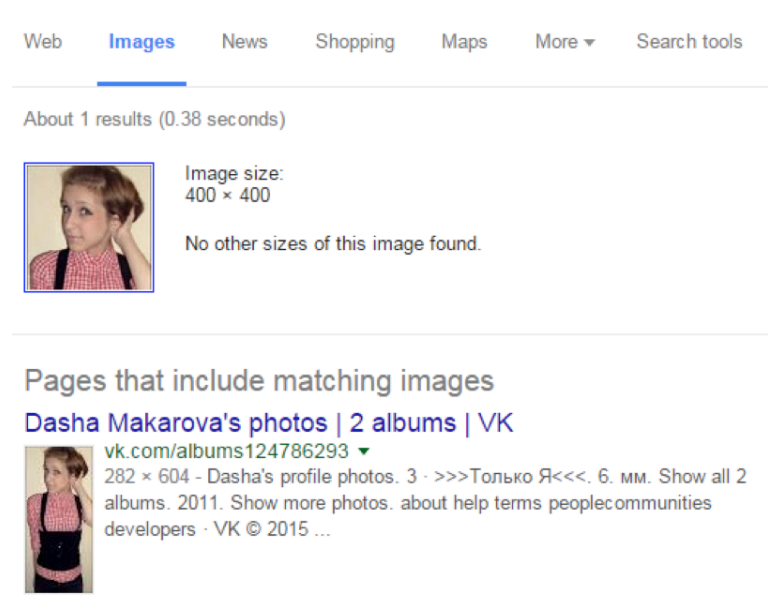


This bomb threat [did actually take place](#), but these bots are not reliable sources of information. So, how do you find out if a source is a real person, or just a bot? Other than the context clues of the account's tweets, such as sending out thousands of tweets with only a handful of followers, you can reverse image search the user's avatar.

Most bots and other unreliable sources—both in Russia and elsewhere—will use stolen photographs of other people as their avatars. For the Twitter bot @PatnietecnAmwa (or “Mashka Ya,” indicating that the woman’s name is Mariya), a quick investigation of the account’s avatar reveals that the Twitter account is likely not operated by a human.

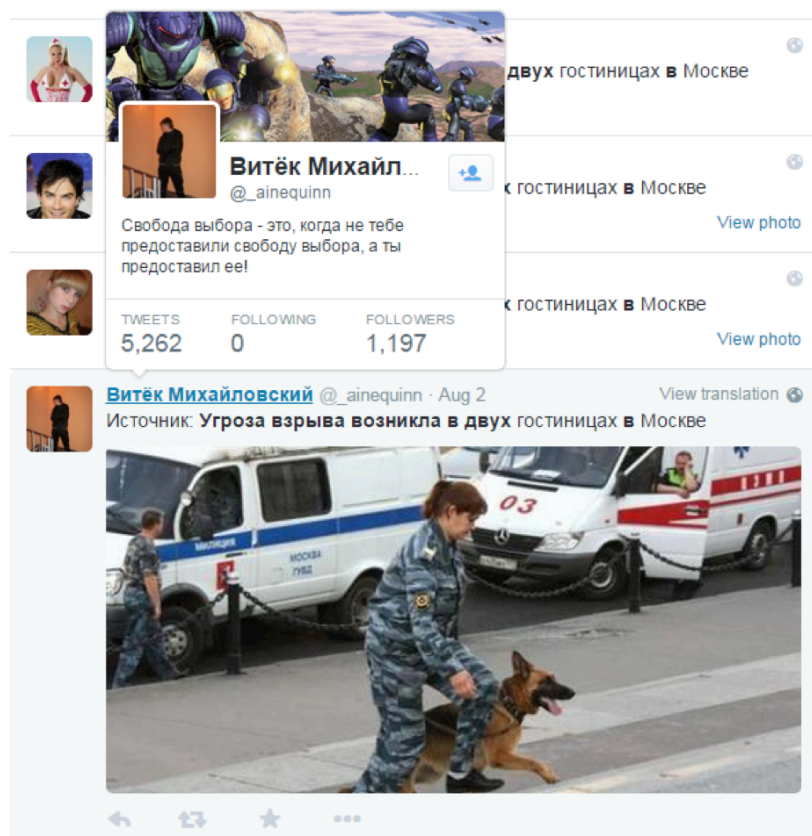


After copying the URL of the avatar (or just clicking “Search Google for this image” in the Chrome Web browser), paste the link into a reverse Google image search to find similar pictures elsewhere online.



Here, we see that the avatar of “Mashka” is actually a woman named Dasha Makarova, and that the Twitter user’s avatar was almost certainly stolen from the woman’s VKontakte page.

To find the original source of this tweet, search the headline on Twitter and find the first person who tweeted those exact words on the day of the flood of bot tweets. The original source of this tweet comes from @_ainequinn, a more reliable user than the other bots, as he has over a thousand followers.



However, we still must verify the information in this tweet, even if the source seems to be reliable. The photograph shared by this user shows a scene that seems to fit the situation: emergency responders, a bomb-sniffing dog, and a truck with the word “MOSCOW” (Москва) on its side. A reverse image search reveals, however, that this

photograph is commonly reused in reports about emergency responses in Moscow, appearing in various news stories as far back as 2011.

Pages that include matching images

Две тысячи человек эвакуированы из ТЦ в подмосковном ...

ria.ru/incidents/.../1069951831.html Translate this page
600 × 340 - Jun 14, 2015 - На месте работают кинологи. Торговый центр находится в районе второго километра внешней стороны МКАД. Кинолог с собакой.

Два ТРК эвакуируют в Петербурге из-за звонков о ...

ria.ru/incidents/.../1054388299.html Translate this page
600 × 340 - Mar 25, 2015 - ... на Долгоозерной улице в Санкт-Петербурге эвакуируют из-за звонков о минировании. Идет проверка помещений. Кинолог с собакой.

День кинологических подразделений МВД России. Справка

ria.ru/spravka/20110621/390638406.html Translate this page
600 × 340 - Jun 21, 2011 - Кинолог с собакой у здания Российской государственной библиотеки ... В России использовать собак для службы в полиции стали с ...

Правоохранители не нашли бомбу в московском ТЦ ...

ria.ru/incidents/.../1001205317.html Translate this page
600 × 340 - Mar 26, 2014 - Кинолог с собакой. Архивное фото. © РИА Новости. Владимир Федоренко | Купить иллюстрацию. МОСКВА, 26 мар — РИА Новости.

Почти тысячу человек эвакуировали из ТЦ "Ереван Плаза"

ria.ru/incidents/.../1001200608.html Translate this page
600 × 340 - Mar 26, 2014 - Кинолог с собакой. Архивное фото ... Проводится эвакуация, на месте работают кинологи", — сказал собеседник агентства. Примерно ...

While the more human-seeming Twitter account appears to be a more reliable source of information than a horde of bot accounts, the photograph that accompanied the tweet is generically used and not truly from the scene of the bomb threat. Thus, as we see from these examples, it is always necessary to verify specific pieces of information using all available means.

The next installment in this guidebook will be an introduction to Russian social networks and the unique Russian and Ukrainian usage of Facebook and Twitter.

What You Need to Know About Russian Social Networks to Conduct Open-Source Research

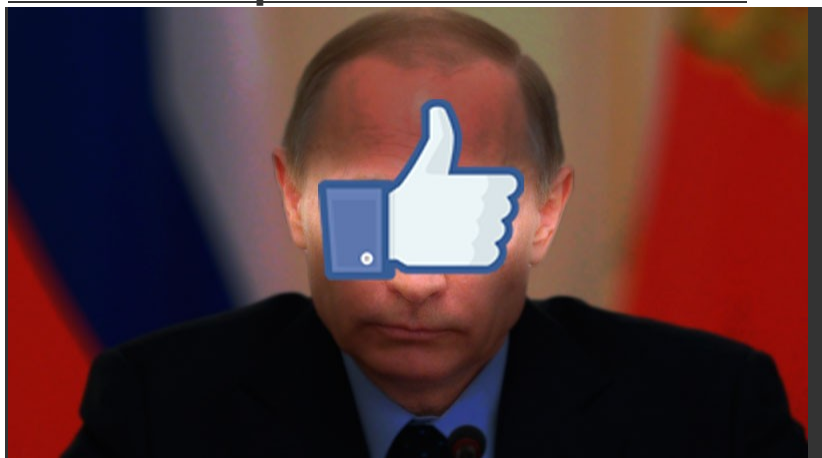


Image created by Kevin Rothrock.

Outside of the familiar English-language social networks of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and too many more to name, there is a handful of social media platforms used either exclusively or primarily in the post-Soviet world. While the instructions and tips laid out here are meant specifically for Russia's homegrown social networks, the general approach is the same for research conducted on any such website—especially regional networks.

Contents

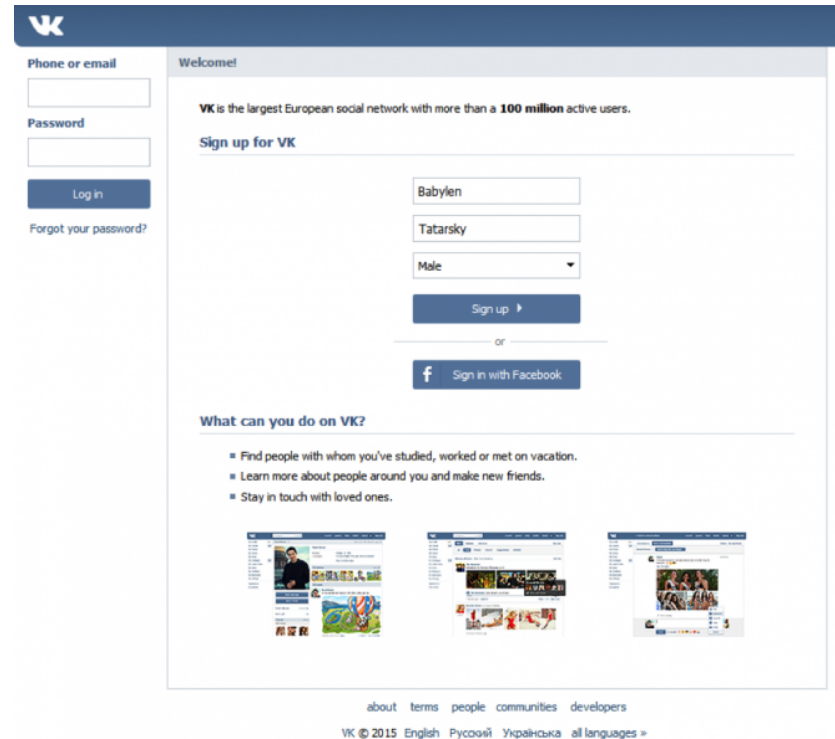
- [VKontakte](#)
- [Odnoklassniki](#)
- [Moi Mir](#)
- VKontakte (or VK, which means “In Contact”) is by far the most popular social network in Russia. The layout is basically the same as Facebook of years past, but with added quirks and a heavy dose of pirated content.
- Odnoklassniki (“Classmates”) is the second most popular platform in Russia. The demographics for this service tend to skew older than other services, but it's still immensely popular.
- Many Russians and Ukrainians also maintain profiles on Moi Mir (“My World”), a service operated by Mail.ru. Accessing information on a stranger's Moi Mir account is more restricted than it is with the other services listed here.

VKontakte

VK is by far the most important and popular social network in Russia and Ukraine. The same is true

in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and other Russian-speaking former Soviet states. [In 2014](#), there were more than 60 million VK users in Russia, compared with only 10 million Facebook users. Learning the ins and outs of this social network is essential in conducting open-source research on the RuNet.

Because you need to have an account on VK to access much of the information available on the website, you should register an account, if you do not already have one. If you are using VK purely for monitoring and research, there is no need to enter your real name or personal details—all you need is a valid phone number to receive a confirmation SMS.



The image shows the VK.com login and registration interface. On the left, there is a login section with fields for 'Phone or email' and 'Password', a 'Log in' button, and a link for 'Forgot your password?'. The main section is titled 'Welcome!' and states 'VK is the largest European social network with more than a 100 million active users.' Below this is a 'Sign up for VK' section with fields for 'Baby/en', 'Tatarsky', and 'Male', a 'Sign up' button, and a 'Sign in with Facebook' button. At the bottom, there is a section titled 'What can you do on VK?' with three bullet points: 'Find people with whom you've studied, worked or met on vacation.', 'Learn more about people around you and make new friends.', and 'Stay in touch with loved ones.' Below the text are three small thumbnail images of VK profiles. At the very bottom, there are links for 'about', 'terms', 'people', 'communities', and 'developers', followed by the copyright notice 'VK © 2015' and language options: 'English', 'Русский', 'Українська', and 'all languages »'.

You must have a way to receive an SMS message to confirm your account.

Account validation

For security reasons we will now send an activation code to your mobile phone. It is free.

Country

USA (+1)

Mobile number

+1

Get code

Your number is **not** displayed anywhere on the site and will only be used as a login. It is free.

Phone number example: +1 000 0000000




- The military service information is also unique to VK, when compared to Facebook. Many soldiers and veterans will have numerous battalions and groups listed here. Russia has military conscription for young men, and many (but not all) men will have some military experience, whether it is listed on VK or not. Contract soldiers will often list multiple military units in which they served, possibly with both conscripted and contracted units. Additionally, soldiers will often join public groups for their military unit.
- Click “See All” next to photos to see all of a user's albums and profile pictures in one place.

The account-setup process is very similar to Facebook's, with user-inputted personal information, pictures, a place for “posts” (similar to a Facebook timeline), and a list of friends. Note some of the highlighted sections in the image below, which are of use when tracking Russian, Ukrainian, and separatist soldiers, for instance:

- In the top right, there is a “last login” feature, which is not on Facebook. There is no way to see the location of the last login, however.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy ✓ last seen 1 April at 6:42 am



Vladimir Zhirinovskiy

Hometown: Анна-Ата
 Relationship status: Married
 Studied at: МГУ '70
[Hide full information](#)

Contact information

Current city: Moscow
 Website: <http://www.ldpr.ru/>
<https://twitter.com/Zhirinovskiy>
<http://instagram.com/zhirinovskiy>
<http://my.mail.ru/mail/zhirinovskiy/>

Education

College or university: МГУ '70
 Department: Институт стран Азии и Африки
 College or university: МГУ '77
 Department: Юридический

Beliefs

Political views: Liberal

Personal information

Activities: Лидер партии ЛДПР, Депутат Государственной Думы Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации VI созыва
 Favorite quotes: В Россию, в Россию всем сердцем влюблен я И с нею останусь навеки, кланусь!
 Groups: Лдпр либерально-демократическая партия россия, Челябинское региональное отделение ЛДПР, Омское региональное отделение ЛДПР 55, Первомайский митинг ЛДПР

Military Service

Branch/Unit: Политическое управление штаба Закавказского военного округа
 Georgia, 1970-1972

938 photos [see all](#)

724 posts

Photos of Vladimir 172

Videos of Vladimir 1

Vladimir's followers 435,346

[Send a gift](#)

Friends 11 friends

Maxim Balashov Boris Chernyshov Andris Mat

Pavel Durov Alexey Didenko Vasily Vlasov

Online friends 1 friend

Andris Mat

The search functions on VK are much more robust than on Facebook, and very easy to use. If you were to look for soldiers from Pskov, Russia serving in 2014, the search parameters below yield numerous results:

VK [search](#) [games](#) [help](#) [invite](#) [music](#) [log out](#)

My Profile edit [Search](#)

People [Communities](#) [Music](#) [Videos](#)

194 people found By rating ▾

Alexander Tevzadze
[Add to friends](#)

Serega Guschin
 Antioch University - LA Campus
[Add to friends](#)

Vova Nilov
 LOOK3
[Add to friends](#)

Max Petrov
[Add to friends](#)

Ilya Ilyin
[Add to friends](#)

Yaroslav Martynchuk
 College Агротехнический колледж (бывш. ПКОТ)
[Add to friends](#)

Region
 Russia ▾
 None ▾

School
 Choose a school ▾

College or university
 Choose a university ▾

Age
 From ▾ To ▾

Sex
☐ Female
☒ Male
☐ Any

Relationship status
 Choose a status ▾
☐ With photo
☐ Online now

Personal ▾

Places ▾

Company ▾


Military Service ▴
 Russia ▾
 Choose a branch ▾
 2014 ▾

Extra options ▾


You can also use more advanced options in specific cases, to narrow your results to show just users with certain kinds of employment, military service, or education, past or present. For example, if you wanted to conduct research on corruption in Kyiv, you could search for specific job titles, such as civil clerks, police officers, judges, and so on, then scavenge the available open-source information to find signs of conspicuous wealth or lavish trips.

In the example below, the search parameters are set for residents of Kyiv who list “police” (милиция) in their employment field.


201 people found By rating ▾




Sanya Bely
НАВД (КНУВД)
[Add to friends](#)




Larisa Gorbachenko
МИЛИЦИЯ
[Add to friends](#)




Bodaya Shapoval
УНВС (УГАУ)
[Add to friends](#)



Masha Dedekaeva
Группа поддержки милиции
[Add to friends](#)



Yuliya Stiranka
Вышгородское отделение милиции
[Add to friends](#)



Alexander Vovk
СунГУ (СунДУ)
[Add to friends](#)

Region

Ukraine ▾

Kiev ▾

School

Choose a school ▾

College or university

Choose a university ▾

Age

From ▾ - To ▾

Sex

☐ Female

☐ Male

☒ Any

Relationship status

Choose a status ▾

☒ With photo

☐ Online now

Personal ▲

Religious views

Personal Priority ▾

Important in Others ▾

Views on Smoking ▾

Views on Alcohol ▾

Company ▲

Милиция

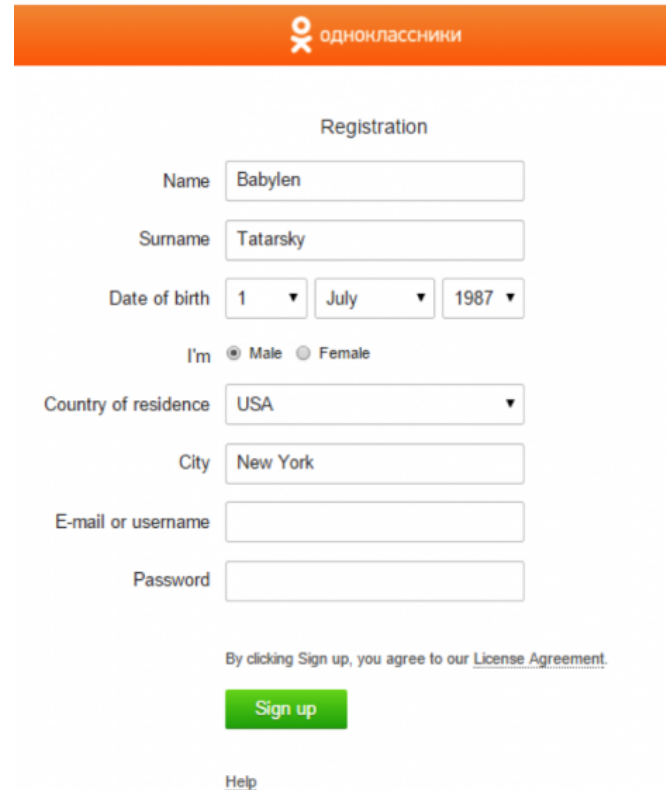
Position

Of course, not every one of these results will be police officers. For example, one search result is someone who is part of the “Group for the Support of the Police,” and is likely not an actual police officer. Additionally, there are hundreds of other police officers who are simply not on VK, or did not list their job titles in searchable fields. If you're looking for someone who isn't discoverable using this kind of search, it's important to track networks of contacts (partners, relatives, colleagues, and so on) who might provide more information for your research topic.

Odnoklassniki

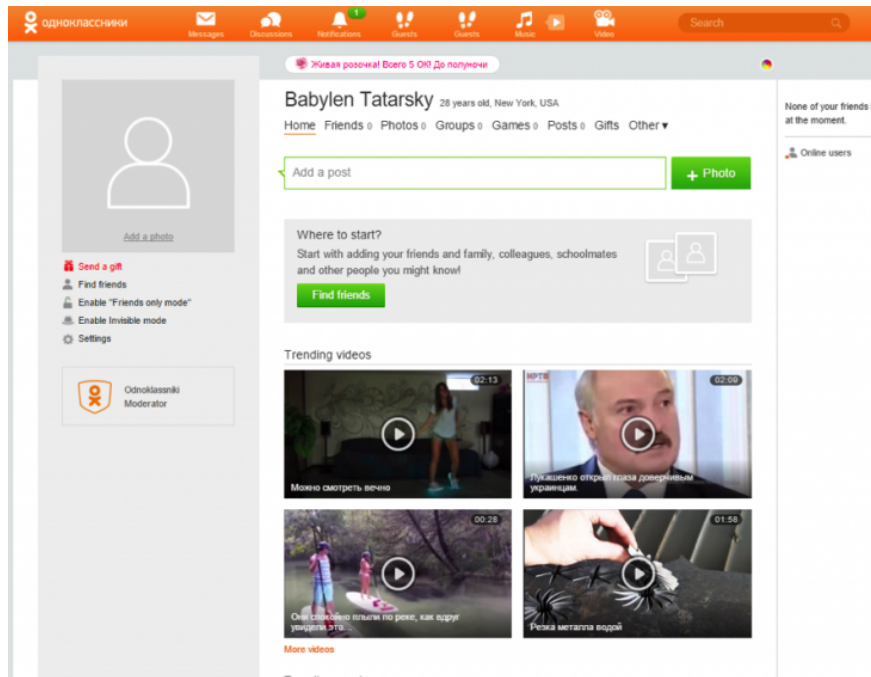
Odnoklassniki is the second-most popular social network in Russia. Like VKontakte, Odnoklassniki is very popular in post-Soviet, Russian-speaking countries, including Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Georgia. In 2014, Odnoklassniki had around [40 million registered users in Russia and 65 million in total](#). The service's users are typically [older and more likely to be women](#) than any other Russian social network.

Registering for Odnoklassniki is a bit easier than VK, since you do not need to provide SMS confirmation. However, unlocking extra account features requires SMS confirmation.

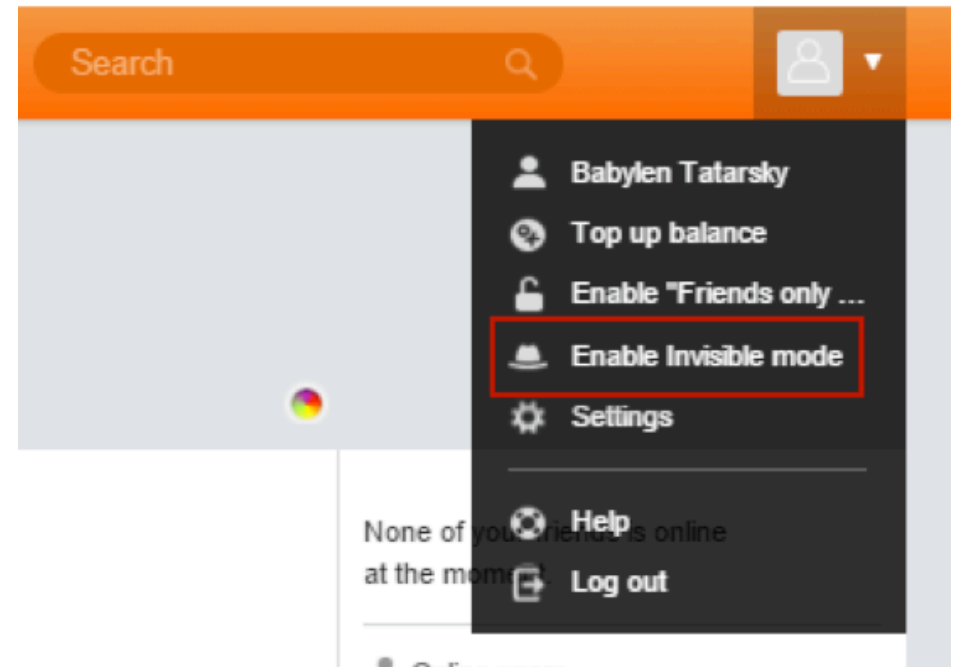


The screenshot shows the Odnoklassniki registration page. At the top is an orange header with the Odnoklassniki logo and the word "одноклассники". Below the header, the word "Registration" is centered. The form consists of several fields: "Name" with the value "Babylen", "Surname" with the value "Tatarsky", "Date of birth" with dropdowns for "1", "July", and "1987", "I'm" with radio buttons for "Male" (selected) and "Female", "Country of residence" with a dropdown menu showing "USA", "City" with the value "New York", "E-mail or username" (empty), and "Password" (empty). Below the form, there is a line of text: "By clicking Sign up, you agree to our [License Agreement](#)." followed by a green "Sign up" button. At the bottom, there is a link for "Help".

After registering, you will be greeted by the home page, which looks quite a bit different than VK (and, by extension, Facebook).



Odnoklassniki is unique among modern social networks in that it provides users with the identities of people who visit their accounts pages. Therefore, if you are trying to conduct a discreet open-source investigation, it is important either to search anonymously, or to “Enable Invisible Mode.”



Browsing Odnoklassniki anonymously, however, is not free—it costs “OKs,” a sort of digital currency on the site.

Invisible mode



The ability to visit other users' profiles and stay completely invisible.

Invisible mode for 50 days costs 100 OKs. [Select Different Period](#)

Ordering 100 OK

[Proceed to payment](#)

OK

100 OKs, which allows 50 days of anonymous use, costs 100 rubles (not even \$2). You can buy these credits with a variety of payment methods, including credit cards.

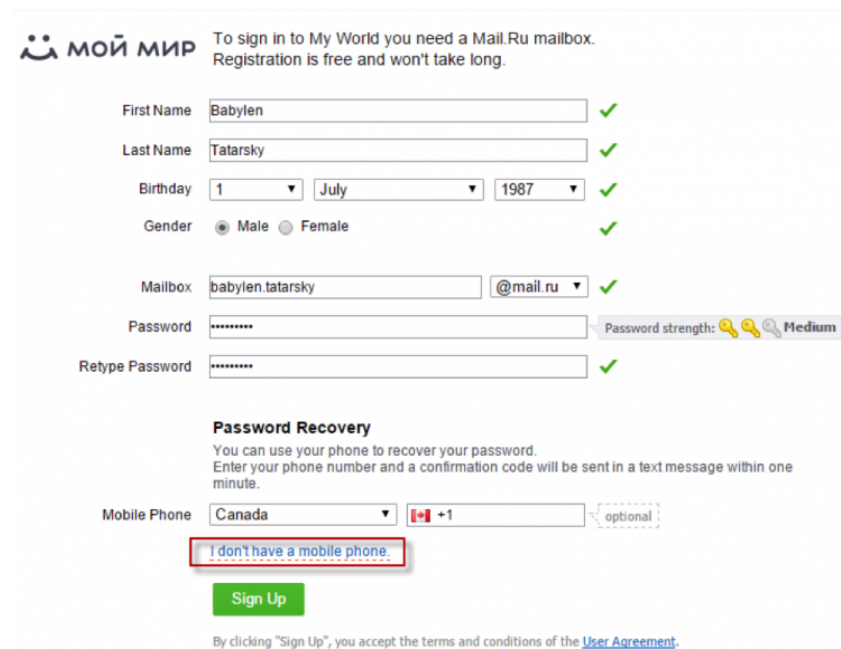
Like VK, Odnoklassniki has a robust set of search parameters:

Moi Mir

The third-most popular Russian social network is [Moi Mir](#), an offshoot of the Mail.ru web service, not unlike the relationship of Google+ to Gmail. [As of 2014](#), Moi Mir had about 25 million Russian

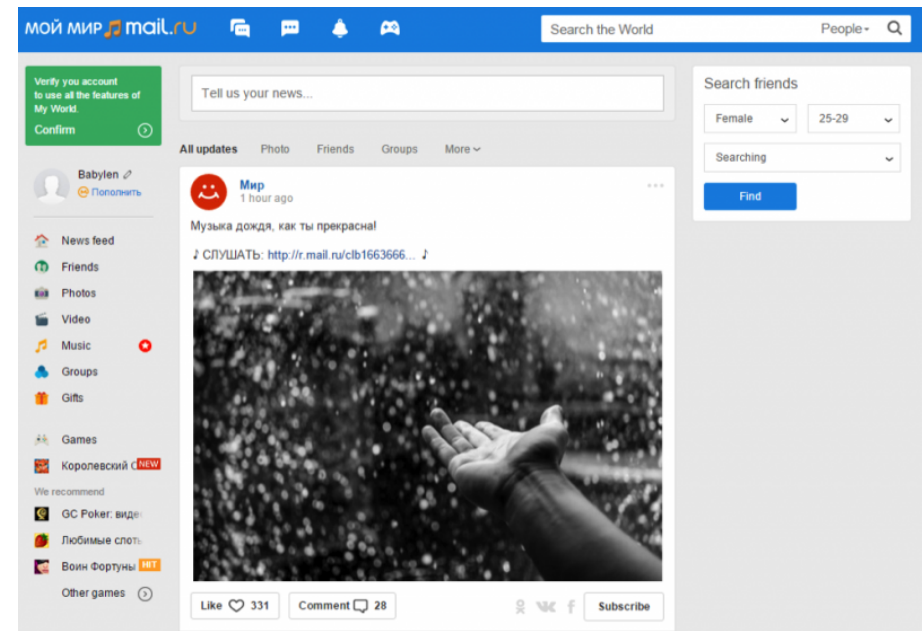
users—roughly the same number of active Russian Facebook users in the same year.

Moi Mir users set up their accounts through a Mail.ru e-mail address. As with Odnoklassniki, no SMS verification is required to complete registration on Moi Mir:



The screenshot shows the registration page for 'мой мир' (My World) on Mail.ru. The page has a blue header with the logo and navigation links. The main content area is white and contains a registration form. The form fields are: First Name (filled with 'Babylen'), Last Name (filled with 'Tatarsky'), Birthday (filled with '1', 'July', '1987'), Gender (radio buttons for 'Male' and 'Female'), Mailbox (filled with 'babylen.tatarsky' and '@mail.ru'), Password (filled with '*****'), and Retype Password (filled with '*****'). Each field has a green checkmark to its right. Below the password fields is a 'Password Recovery' section with a link to recover the password. At the bottom, there is a 'Mobile Phone' field with a dropdown for 'Canada' and a '+1' button, followed by a link 'I don't have a mobile phone.' and a green 'Sign Up' button. A small note at the bottom says 'By clicking "Sign Up", you accept the terms and conditions of the User Agreement.'

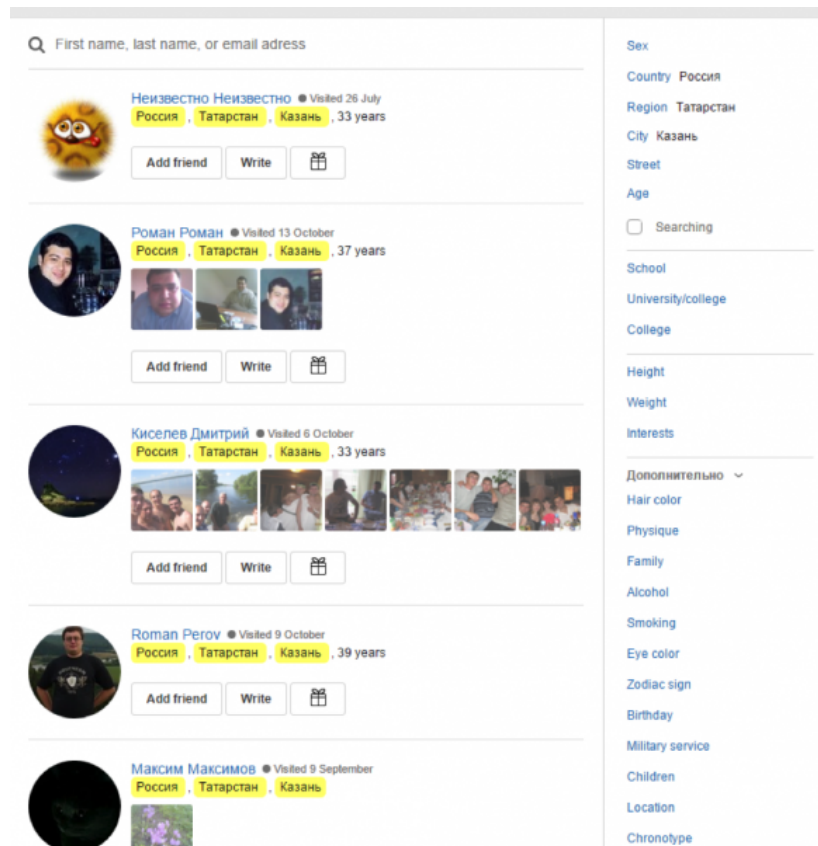
After selecting “Join now” on the signup screen, registration for a Moi Mir account is complete.



As with Odnoklassniki, optional account verification via SMS will unlock a Moi Mir account's full features, but this isn't necessary to use the site's basic features.

The search functionality of Moi Mir has many of the same features as VK and Odnoklassniki, but it is clearly aimed at being more of a dating site. Many of the search parameters are based on physical appearance, or (in what is likely unique for any social network) the user’s “Chronotype,” signifying

when someone typically wakes up and goes to sleep.



As you can see from the screenshots above, you need to be able either to read Russian or to copy and paste in Russian city names to search users

based on location, as the site is not accessible in English.

These three social networks are the largest such websites specific to Russian and post-Soviet users, but Russians also use Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and other sites. There has been continued Russian-language growth on these networks from all angles, whether we're talking about the strong community of anti-Kremlin opposition users on Facebook, [Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's infamous antics on Instagram](#), or [popular pro-Kremlin Twitter accounts](#). If you want to conduct research using the networks with the largest numbers of ordinary Russian speakers, however, you need to gain some fluency in using VK, Odnoklassniki, and (to a lesser extent) Moi Mir.

Want to Research the Russian Internet But Don't Speak Russian? We Can Help.



“Help.” Photograph by Ali Moradi, April 20, 2010. Halifax, Nova Scotia. CC 2.0. Edited by Kevin Rothrock.

Conducting open-source research can be difficult, and it's even more challenging when you cannot read or write in the language of your research topic. Thanks to the Internet, however, even these obstacles don't make it impossible for people who don't speak Russian to conduct such research in Russian. To do so, you need to have equal parts patience and technical knowhow in navigating search algorithms and translation tools. This guide

identifies and explains free resources that allow you to conduct Russian-language open-source research without knowing the language. Here you'll also learn how to navigate search algorithms on Google and Twitter to retrieve usable information.

Contents

- [Google Translate](#)
- [Abbreviations and Acronyms](#)
- [Searching in Russian](#)

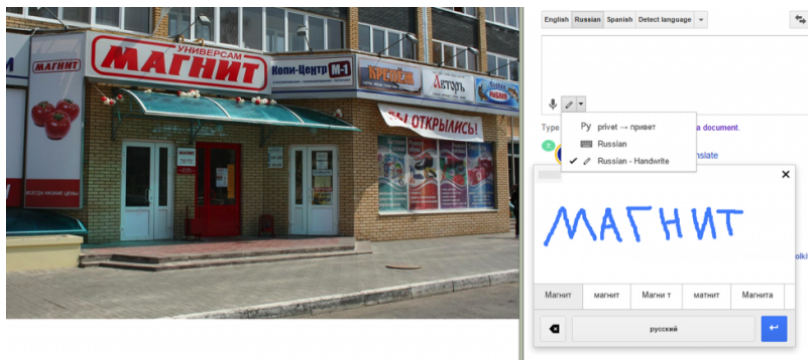
Google Translate

If you have little or no Russian language skills, then translation software is an absolute necessity for conducting research on Russian open-source information. [Google Translate](#) is the most versatile tool for translation, offering many features you likely know about already, along with some others that might be less familiar.

The normal translation function of Google Translate is certainly already obvious to you—copy and paste in Russian (or type in English) text, and receive a translation. You can also enter a

website's URL into the translation box and see the entire page translated into any given language.

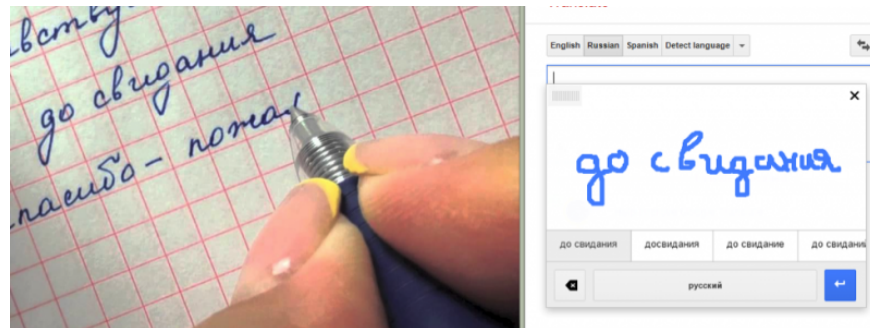
If you have trouble reading the Russian alphabet, Google Translate's "drawing" function, which allows you to outline letters using your mouse or trackpad, converts the sketches into editable, translatable text. See below for an example with a Магнит ("Magnit," meaning "magnet") supermarket storefront:



As you draw your text, Google automatically suggests editable text to match your sketch. Sometimes the first suggestion isn't always correct, so be sure to review the options.

In an especially useful feature, Google's tool can also recognize cursive handwriting, which

can greatly differ from printed Russian text. Below, the phrase до свидания ("do svidaniya," or "goodbye") is successfully rendered into type by Google's handwriting tool:



Abbreviations and Acronyms

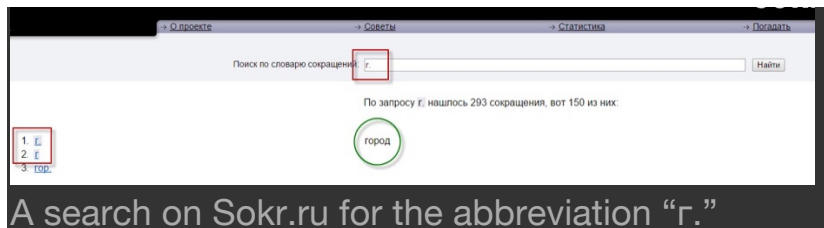
As with English, there are a seemingly endless number of bureaucratic acronyms in Russian, and the website Sokr.ru helps navigate many of these puzzles. For decoding location-specific language, especially useful is [this Russian Wikipedia entry](#), which lists the common abbreviations for various localities in Russia (cities, towns, villages, and so on).

For example, the following text is found in the title of a [video on VK](#), put out by a pro-separatist video channel. Using the two tools outlined above, it's

possible to decipher the information, even without speaking Russian.

г.Донецк Ленинский р-н обстрел РСЗО “Ураган”

There are three abbreviations here, all of which are very common among videos related to the Ukrainian conflict:



1. **г. Донецк:** The first listing for “г.” On Sokr.ru brings up “город” (city), which is also the second entry on the Wikipedia page listing abbreviations. This describes the city of Donetsk (Донецк).
2. **Ленинский р-н:** Both the Sokr.ru website and Wikipedia say this means “район” (region/district) for this abbreviation. This describes the Lenin (Ленинский) district.
3. **РСЗО:** This has nothing to do with towns, so we must rely on [Sokr](#), which tells us that

this acronym is short for “реактивная система залпового огня / ракетная система залпового огня” (reactive system of volley fire / rocket system of volley fire). The English equivalent to this is “multiple rocket launcher system” (MLRS), which in this case refers to the Uragan (“Hurricane”) MLRS.

Therefore, the title of the video is “City of Donetsk Leninskiy district shelling MLRS ‘Uragan’”

Searching in Russian

In English, words rarely change based on their role in a sentence, but they occasionally will add a letter to indicate count or possession (soldier, soldiers, soldier’s, soldiers’), or in the case of some pronouns to indicate subject or object (who or whom, he or him, she or her, and so on).

Things are not so simple in Russian, as there are about a dozen forms for each word (indicating singularity or plurality and case), and several different conjugations of verbs. Depending on its role in the sentence (subject, direct object,

indirect object, plural, plural direct object, and so on), the word “cat” can have the following nine declined (changed) forms: кошка, кошки, кошке, кошку, кошкой, кошек, кошкам, кошками, кошках. Making things more complicated, each of these spellings returns different results in a Twitter search—for example, the simple “cat” or “cats” forms of the noun will bring back far more results than advanced searched for “with a cat” or “with cats.”

Wiktionary provides the declined forms for most words in its Declension section, along with verb conjugations. For example, [the Wiktionary entry for кошка \(cat\)](#) shows the singular and plural forms for each of the six Russian cases. When carrying out searches, be sure to remove the accent mark (the small mark on the **ó**, as seen in **кóшка**) from the letters by pressing backspace in front of the accented letter.

Noun [edit]

кóшка • (kóška) *f anim*

1. cat

жить как **кошка** с собакой — *žít' kak kóška s sobakoj* — to lead a cat-and-dog life
играть в **кошки-мышки** — *igrat' v kóški-myški* — play cat-and-mouse
ночью все **кошки** серы — *noč'ju vse kóški sery* — at night all cats are gray
у него **кошки** скребут на сердце — *u nego kóški skrebut na serdce* — he is sick at heart (very upset)

2. cat-o'-nine-tails

3. (technical) grapnel, drag

4. (technical) grappel fork

5. (cranes) car, trolley, carriage

6. (geology) spit, bar

7. (in the plural) climbing irons, climbing grapplers

Declension [edit]

Declension of кошка [hide ▲]		
	singular	plural
nominative	кóшка kóška	кóшки kóški
genitive	кóшки kóški	кóшек kóšek
dative	кóшке kóške	кóшкам kóškam
accusative	кóшку kóšku	кóшек kóšek
instrumental	кóшкой, кóшкою kóškoj, kóškoju	кóшками kóškami
prepositional	кóшке kóške	кóшках kóškax

When searching on Google, this is not much of a problem, as the search algorithms are able to include many of the forms of a word in its searches. (When you enter the Russian word for cat (кошка) in a search, relevant results that include the declined forms—cats, to a cat, of a cat, on a cat, etc.—will also come up.) Therefore, unless you put the word in quotation marks to

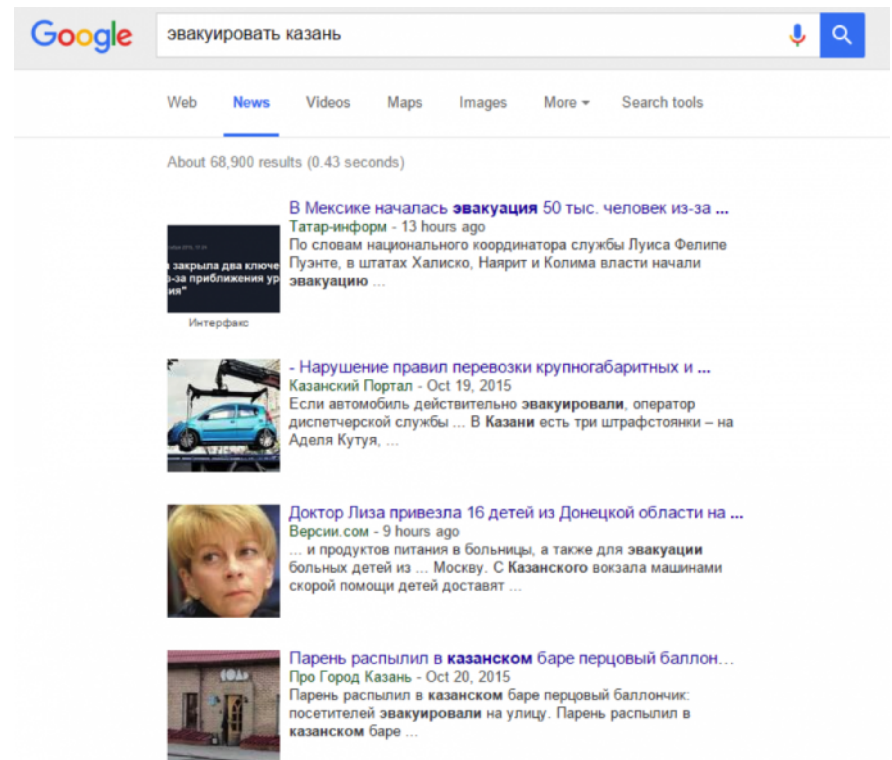
specify the results, there is no need to worry about noun and verb forms when searching on Google in Russian.

On Twitter, however, it's a different story. Twitter can only return results for the exact letters given, and is not able to detect changes in verbs (such as “run,” “ran,” “runs”) or nouns.

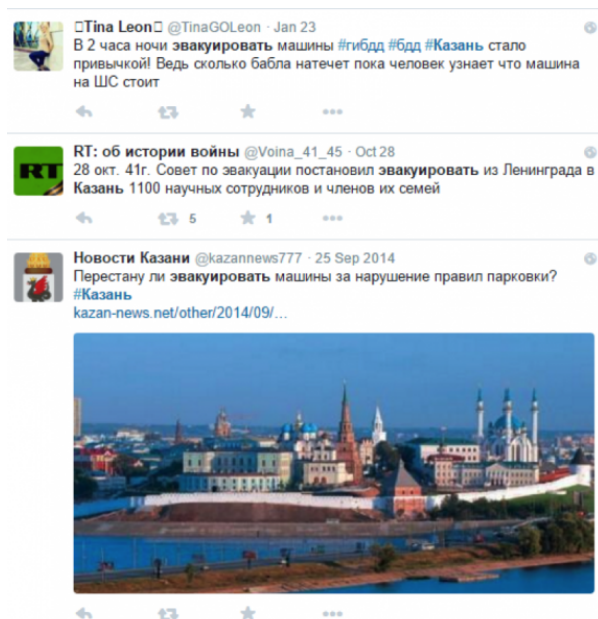
If you were trying to find out information about the evacuation of a building in the city of Kazan, you can get drastically different search results, depending on the word forms you enter in your search. For example, try two searches with [forms of the verb “эвакуировать”](#) (to evacuate) with the search strings of Казань (normal form of “Kazan”) and в Казани (“in Kazan”).

1. Эвакуировать Казань – Evacuate Kazan (no changes to verb/noun forms):

Searching Google News, the results include various forms of both Kazan and Evacuate, but it will also bring back the noun “evacuation” (эвакуация) and adjectival form of Kazan in various declensions:

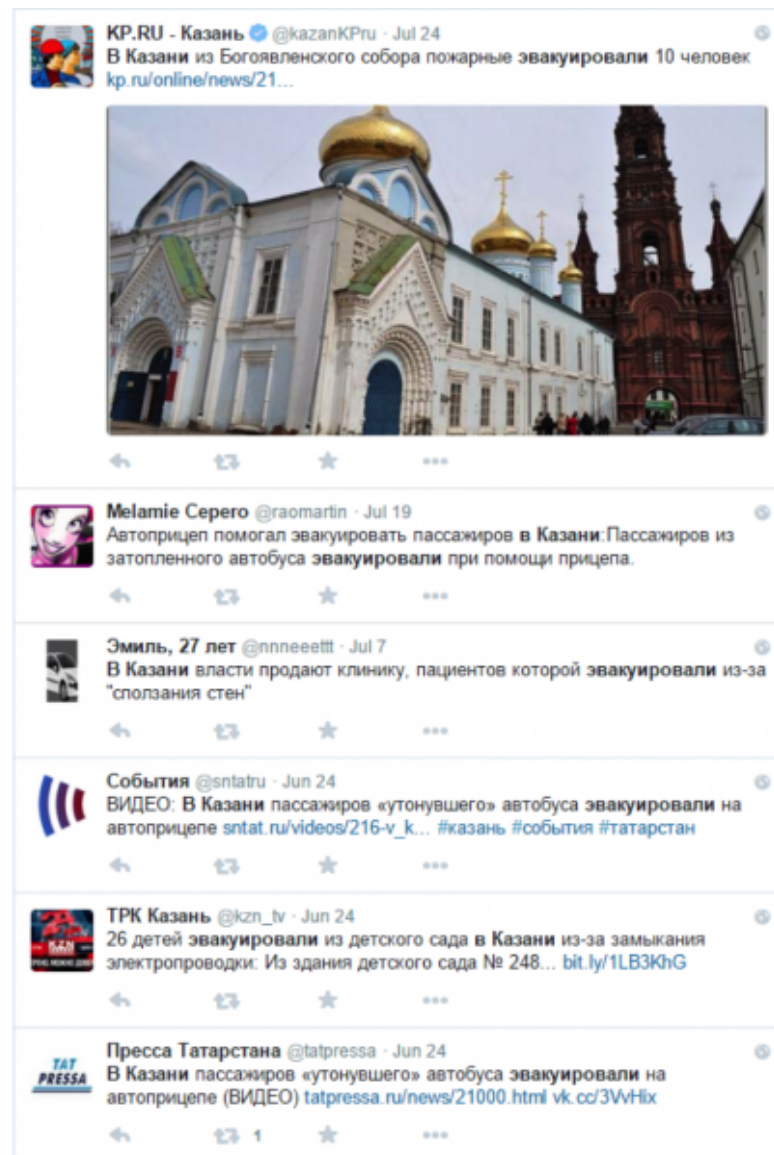


On Twitter, you receive far fewer results, as this form of the “evacuate” verb is rarely used in tweets and news articles. As you see in the results below, there is a 4-month gap between three tweets, indicating that there is either hardly any information about this topic, or the search phrase needs to be revised.



2. Эвакуировали в Казани (“evacuated in Kazan”)

Using the past tense plural form of “evacuate” (common in passive constructions) yields far more useful results than the first search terms. (If you look back to the results from Google News, the second result uses these forms of the words evacuate and Kazan.) The tweets below are quite varied, but are all relevant for the search results, such as the evacuation of a church after a fire, a bus evacuation, and a school evacuation:



If you are not familiar with Russian, it is difficult to know what phrases and search parameters to use to maximize results. So, it's a good idea to enter general Russian terms and phrases into Google—such as “evacuation” and “Kazan”—and then copy the terms used most often. After we did this with the news results from Google, we found many more relevant results in our Twitter search, which—it's important to recall—is not very accommodating to the malleable nature of Russian nouns and verbs.

As you can see from these guides, researching in Russian—without knowing Russian—can be frustrating and time-consuming, but it is ultimately possible. You do not have to know how to read Russian, or even know the Cyrillic alphabet, to conduct Russian-language open-source research, but it certainly helps to have a basic familiarity with the language. After a while, you will start to recognize the letters and figure out how to read the alphabet, especially as certain names and cities begin to reappear in your searches. In the meantime, this guide will help you leverage

opaque acronyms, Twitter searches, and Google to assist your research efforts.

Unearthing Local Stories on the Russian-Language Internet



Digging for Buk missile systems. Original photo by Mark Robinson. May 1, 2014. CC 2.0. Edited by Kevin Rothrock.

While a lot of open-source research on the RuNet is possible thanks to broad searches on Google, Vkontakte, Twitter, and other websites, sometimes it's best to drill down to the narrowest sources available. This guide will instruct you on how to find local online communities on the Russian-language Internet. Oftentimes, eyewitness accounts, photographs, and videos that spread

virally on the Internet originate in small, relatively unknown communities.

Contents

- [Finding local communities on Vkontakte](#)
- [Navigating local online communities on VKontakte](#)
- [Finding other local groups](#)

How do small groups make big waves on the Internet and in the media? Consider an example from September 2015, when a local online community for the Russian city of Novocherkassk [garnered international attention](#) after someone shared a photograph of a child being walked like a dog.

YAHOO!
NEWS

News Home
U.S.
World
Politics
Tech
Science
Health
Odd News
Local
Dear Abby
Comics
ABC News
Katie Couric
Trending
Photos

Recommended Games
Pool
Poker
More games »

Police Probe After Woman Is Pictured Taking Grandson On 'Dog-Like' Walk With Arm Leash

 September 9, 2015 7:11 AM



As we read the story, we see that the post was made in the “Overheard in Novochoerkassk” group on the Russian social network Vkontakte:

Critics say the snap, taken in Novochoerkassk and uploaded to social media site VKontakte, makes it look like the youngster is being treated like a pooch.

The image was published to the “[Overheard in Novochoerkassk](#)” page, it’s reported.

Content that resonates online widely sometimes originates on such websites, and we as researchers can verify photographs and videos by

tracking down the original source, or by investigating other claims through these pages.

Finding local communities on Vkontakte

For nearly every Russian and Ukrainian city and region, there is a local group on Vkontakte for residents to swap stories and chat. The two most popular groups are called “Подслушано в ...” (“Overheard in...”) and “Типичный ...” (“A Typical Day in...”). In the latter case, the word “typical” (типичный) may change endings to “типичная” or “типичное”, depending on the gender of the locality's name. A Google search, however, yields results for all spellings, regardless of the grammatical ending to the word in the community's name. Additionally, if these two methods do not produce useful results, you may try searching for the word “public” using the phrase: “публик” + [city name].

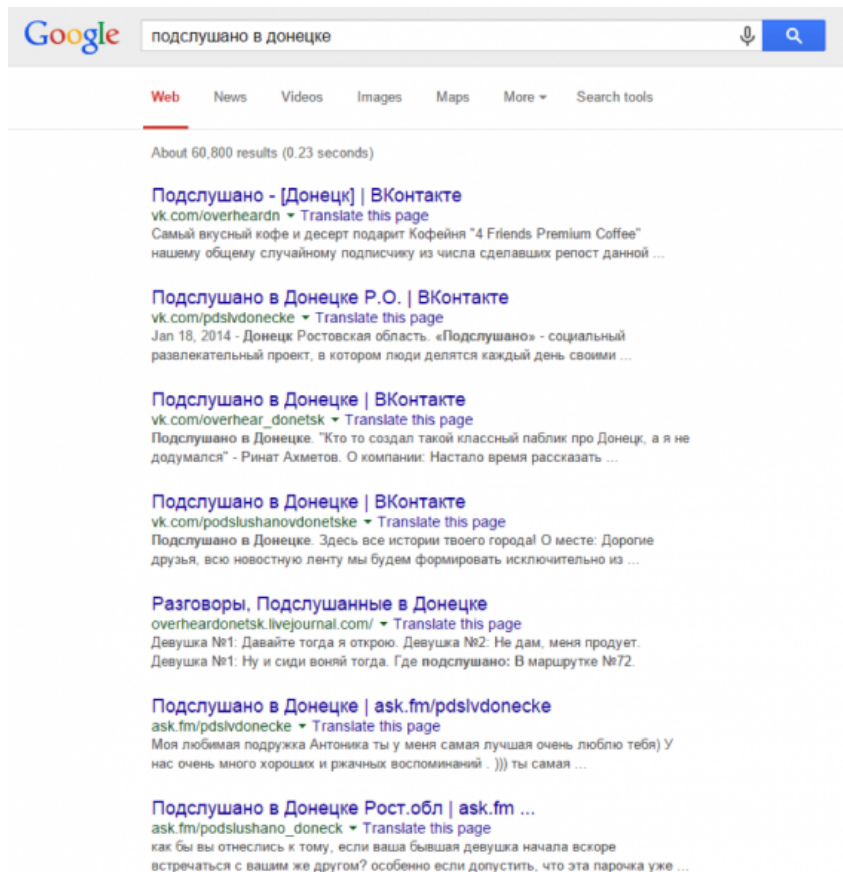
Internet users primarily use these groups to chat with other locals or to find services available in town. Common queries you'll find in these communities are “Who can give me a ride to a

neighboring town?” and “Does anyone know a good place to get my cell phone fixed?”

When news breaks in certain localities, however, these groups can transform into platforms for heated discussions. When war came to eastern Ukraine, some Vkontakte communities became digital spaces to talk about the conflict from local points of view. The topics in these groups include talk of troop movements, checking in on the safety of residents in certain apartment buildings, and sharing photographs and videos of the scenes from the conflict.

As you would imagine, these local groups can offer unique access to open-source information in the form of eyewitnesses and local reports. However, there are challenges, as these groups’ administrators often have strong political allegiances, particularly in conflict scenarios. In eastern Ukraine, for instance, many of the Vkontakte groups’ administrators sympathize with the pro-Russian separatists, leading to either outright censorship or self-censorship from locals who post in these groups.

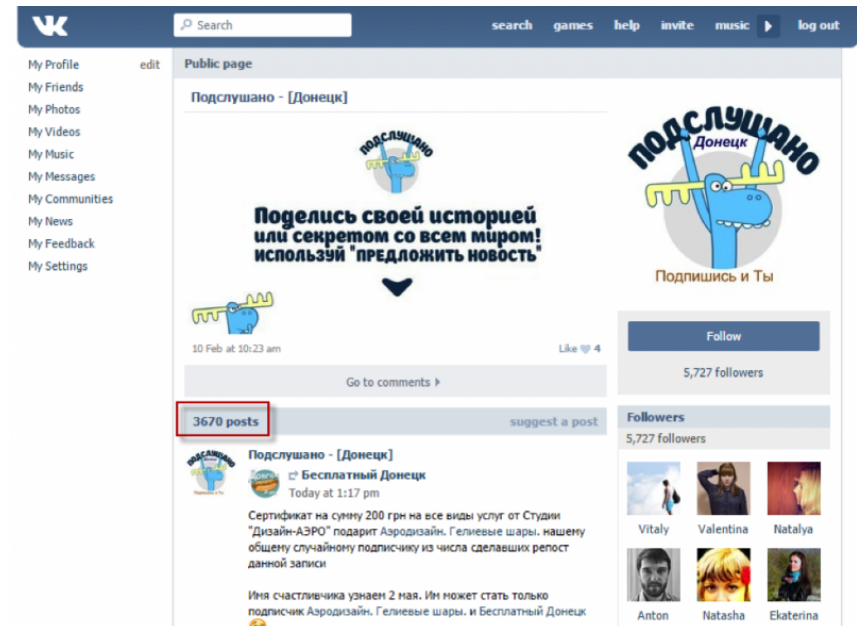
You can find these local groups by searching the Internet for the words “Подслушано в” or “Типичный,” plus a city or region name. Providing the correct grammatical case of the word is not important, as websites like Google can bring relevant results for both “в Донецк” (to Donetsk) and “в Донецке” (in Donetsk), even if one is used incorrectly. The search results for “Подслушано в Донецке” reveal numerous groups, including mirrors for these communities hosted on LiveJournal and Ask.fm (where user-submitted questions are posted), as well as the addresses of the Vkontakte groups.



Navigating local online communities on VKontakte

When you visit some groups, often there are thousands of posts, making it very difficult to find content published several months earlier. Thankfully, there is a quick way to find posts that

are archived. First, click the link that lists how many posts there are in the group (see the red box below).



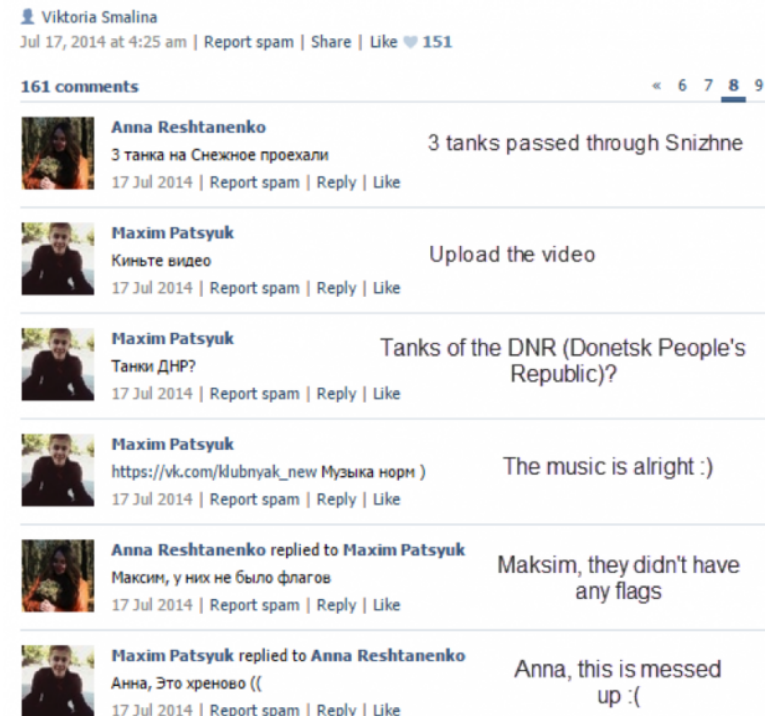
Scroll through a few pages of the group (see the new red box below), and notice the number next to "offset=" in the URL (highlighted in blue below). This number indicates the posts being displayed, with "1" being the most recent. There are 3,670 posts in the group displayed below, as indicated in the screenshot above, so we can determine the the chronology of posts based on that number. If

you replace the number (120 below) with a larger number, you will be able to quickly navigate through old posts. It could take a while, but after entering a few numbers, you can find the correct period of time. For example, if you replace the number 120 above with 1680, then posts from July 17 and 18, 2014, will appear.



When Bellingcat [note to readers: the author of this guidebook is a contributor to Bellingcat] conducted research into the anti-aircraft system that shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, the “Подслушано в Тореze” (Overheard in Torez) group provided essential information. [Eyewitness reports](#) of a military convoy moving through the cities of Torez and Snizhne [were posted in this](#)

[group](#) on July 17, shortly before MH17 was shot down.



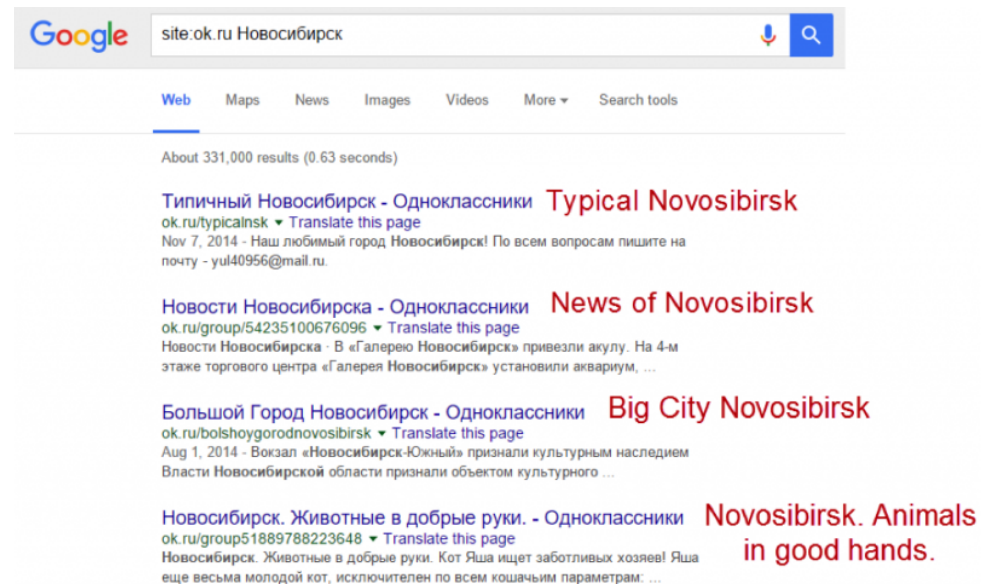
The screenshot above captures correspondence between two Vkontakte accounts that apparently belong to residents of Snizhne and Torez. They discuss how three tanks without flags passed through Snizhne at 1:14 p.m. (local time)—almost exactly three hours before MH17 was shot

down near Snizhne. According to Ukrainian security services, a convoy of [three tanks](#) and two BTRs escorted the Buk system through Snizhne on July 17. Thus, we can use local communities to find eye witnesses who can verify—or refute—the official accounts of government officials.

Finding other local groups

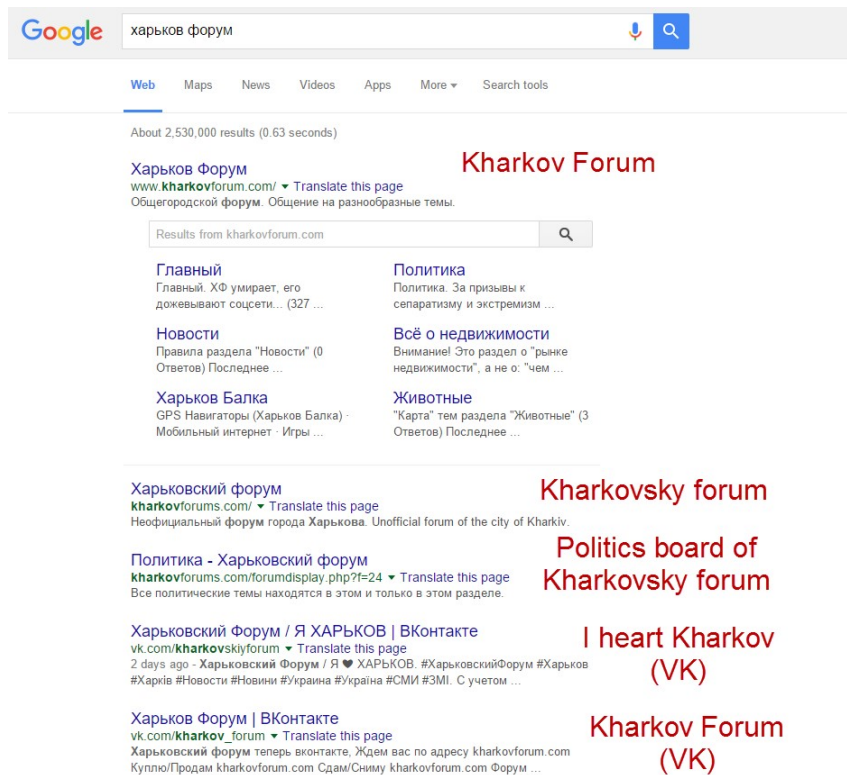
Vkontakte is not the only online forum for local communities; there are several popular social networks and message boards for neighbors to meet and talk.

Many Russian Internet users turn to Odnoklassniki to organize discussion groups almost as often as they use Vkontakte. With a simple Google search, you can find nearly every one of these groups without much trouble. Here is a search string that will identify numerous local groups on Odnoklassniki dedicated to the Russian city of Novosibirsk:



In some communities, public message boards and forums are still popular, though they are not nearly as widely used as groups on Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki. To find these less common communities, search the city name along with keywords that include the word “форум” (forum). In the search below, two unique message boards and two Vkontakte groups reveal the so-called “Kharkov Forum” (Харьков форум). The first result, Kharkov Forum, has hosted millions of messages over the past several years, addressing topics including politics, sports, and

help for soldiers and wounded civilians in the war, and included local chatter about road conditions.



Google харьков форум

About 2,530,000 results (0.63 seconds)

Харьков Форум
www.kharkovforum.com/ Translate this page
Общегородской форум. Общение на разнообразные темы.

Results from kharkovforum.com

Главный
Главный. ХФ умирает, его дожевывают соцсети... (327 ...)

Новости
Правила раздела "Новости" (0 Ответов) Последнее ...

Харьков Балка
GPS Навигаторы (Харьков Балка) - Мобильный интернет - Игры ...

Политика
Политика. За призывы к сепаратизму и экстремизм ...

Всё о недвижимости
Внимание! Это раздел о "рынке недвижимости", а не о "чем ...

Животные
"Карта" тем раздела "Животные" (3 Ответов) Последнее ...

Харьковский форум
kharkovforums.com/ Translate this page
Неофициальный форум города Харькова. Unofficial forum of the city of Kharkiv.

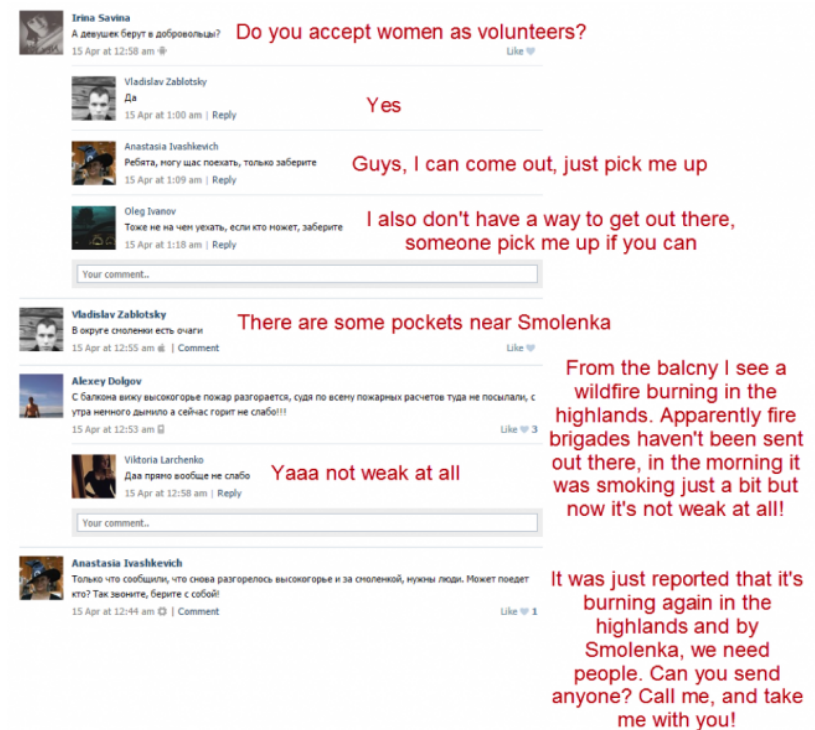
Политика - Харьковский форум
kharkovforums.com/forumdisplay.php?f=24 Translate this page
Все политические темы находятся в этом и только в этом разделе.

Харьковский Форум / Я ХАРЬКОВ | ВКонтакте
vk.com/kharkovskiyforum Translate this page
2 days ago - Харьковский Форум / Я ♥ ХАРЬКОВ. #ХарьковскийФорум #Харьков #Харків #Новости #Новини #Украина #Україна #СМИ #ЗМІ. С учетом ...

Харьков Форум | ВКонтакте
vk.com/kharkov_forum Translate this page
Харьковский форум теперь вконтакте. Ждем вас по адресу kharkovforum.com
Купить/Продать kharkovforum.com Сдам/Сниму kharkovforum.com Форум ...

Additionally, in local communities, outside of the large public groups, there are often improvised communities set up during emergencies, designed to coordinate relief efforts. For example, during the devastating wildfires that swept across Siberia in April 2015, the “[Volunteer Wildfire Firefighters of](#)

[Zabaikalye](#)” public Vkontakte group organized response efforts and distributed useful information to locals about avoiding the approaching forest fires. Additionally, locals wrote in this group to disseminate information and to organize volunteer and humanitarian efforts.



Irina Savina
А девушек берут в добровольцы? Do you accept women as volunteers?
15 Apr at 12:58 am Like

Vladislav Zablotsky
Да Yes
15 Apr at 1:00 am Reply

Anastasia Ivashkevich
Ребята, могу час поехать, только заберите Guys, I can come out, just pick me up
15 Apr at 1:09 am Reply

Oleg Ivanov
Тож не на чем уехать, если кто может, заберите I also don't have a way to get out there, someone pick me up if you can
15 Apr at 1:18 am Reply

Your comment...

Vladislav Zablotsky
В округе Смоленки есть очаги There are some pockets near Smolenka
15 Apr at 12:55 am Like

Alexey Dolgov
С балкона вижу высокогорье пожар разгорается, судя по плану пожарных расчетное туда не посылали, с утра немного дымно а сейчас горит не слабо!!
15 Apr at 12:53 am Like 3

Viktoria Larchenko
Даа прямо вообще не слабо Yaaa not weak at all
15 Apr at 12:58 am Reply

Your comment...

Anastasia Ivashkevich
Только что сообщили, что снова разгорелось высокогорье и за Смоленкой, нужны люди. Может поедет кто? Так звоните, берите с собой! It was just reported that it's burning again in the highlands and by Smolenka, we need people. Can you send anyone? Call me, and take me with you!
15 Apr at 12:44 am Like 1

Researching the RuNet by broadly searching Google, Twitter, and Vkontakte searches can only get you so far. To get through to a more specific, localized stratum of information, you must be able to locate and navigate the groups described above. While much of the open-source research concerning Russia and Ukraine over the past 18 months has focused on the Ukrainian conflict, there are still seemingly endless pools of information on local networks for nearly any other topic of research, from wildfires to local oddities.

Herein Lie the Secrets of Geolocation



Image edited by Kevin Rothrock.

With most photographs and videos, the most reliable way to conduct verification is through satellite images, allowing you to geolocate content by matching it to a known location. Sometimes, this requires observing changes in an area over time. Satellites have photographed almost every inch of the Earth, but there are special considerations when working in Russia and Ukraine concerning the availability of satellites and street-level imagery. This guide will provide instruction on using satellite images, with a focus on historical imagery, and available street-level

imagery accessible for Russian and Ukrainian cities.

Contents

- [Google](#)
- [Yandex](#)
- [Wikimapia](#)

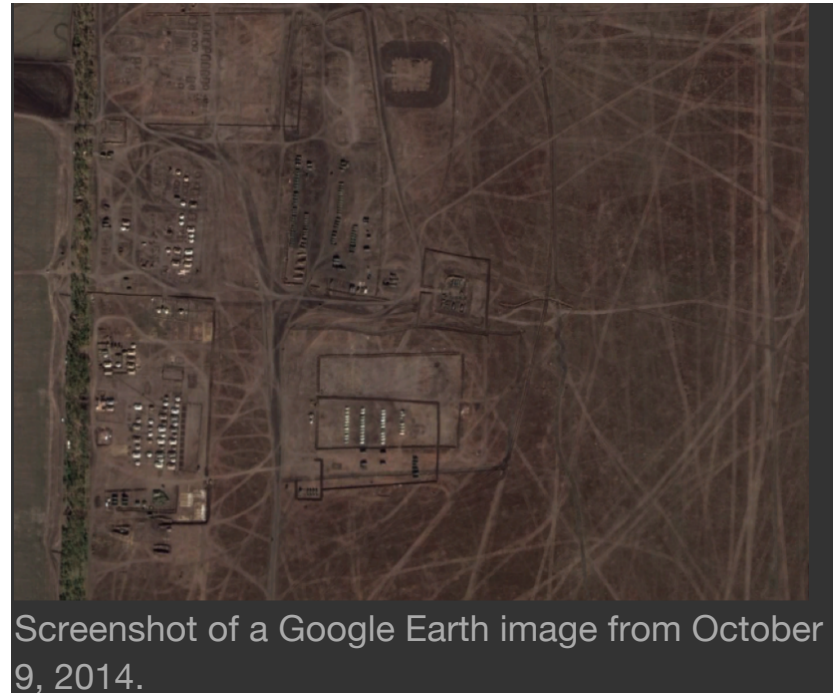
Google

Likely the most useful single piece of software when conducting open-source geolocation research is Google Earth Pro, which can be downloaded for free [here](#). Google purchases its satellite imagery from Digital Globe, a private company with numerous satellites in orbit.

Google Earth—which is a downloadable program—is not the same as Google Maps—which is what you access through your mobile apps or on a Web browser at <http://maps.google.com>. While Google Earth contains many of the same features as the more familiar Google Maps, Google Earth also provides easily accessible historical imagery, 3D terrain mapping, customizable locations, and markers that can be quickly imported and

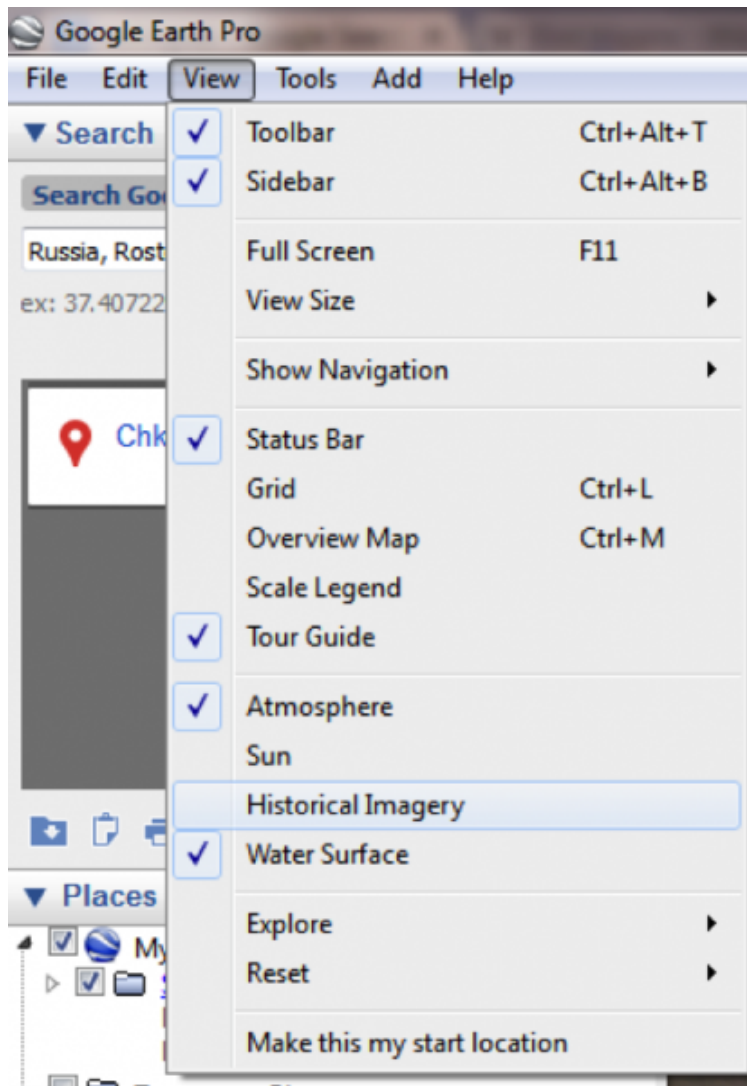
exported, as well as many other features. In short, Google Earth is geared towards the power user, while Google Maps is for more casual use.

Countless open-source reports use historical imagery comparisons in their analysis, but one recent example of this process can be found in a [March 2015 Bellingcat report](#) (note: this text's author, **Aric Toler**, also wrote the **Bellingcat report**) that analyzed a large Russian training camp near the Ukrainian border. Viewing the location of this training camp, just south of the village of Chkalova in the Rostov oblast, reveals an extremely large, well-travelled training camp.



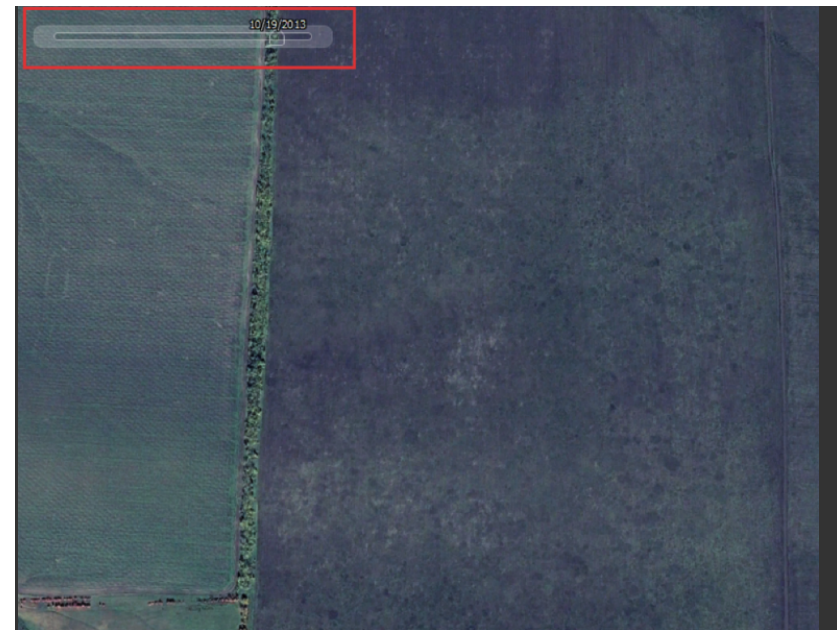
Screenshot of a Google Earth image from October 9, 2014.

A question immediately comes to mind: is this training camp new, or has it been around for years, without any correlation to the Ukrainian crisis? Scrolling through the historical imagery on Google Earth will quickly reveal this answer.



After choosing the “Historical Imagery” option under View, a slider will appear in the top-left

corner of your satellite imagery. After rolling back the imagery to a previous date, we see that this training ground was pristine farmland in October 2013—revealing that the camp sprung up anew after the Ukrainian crisis began.



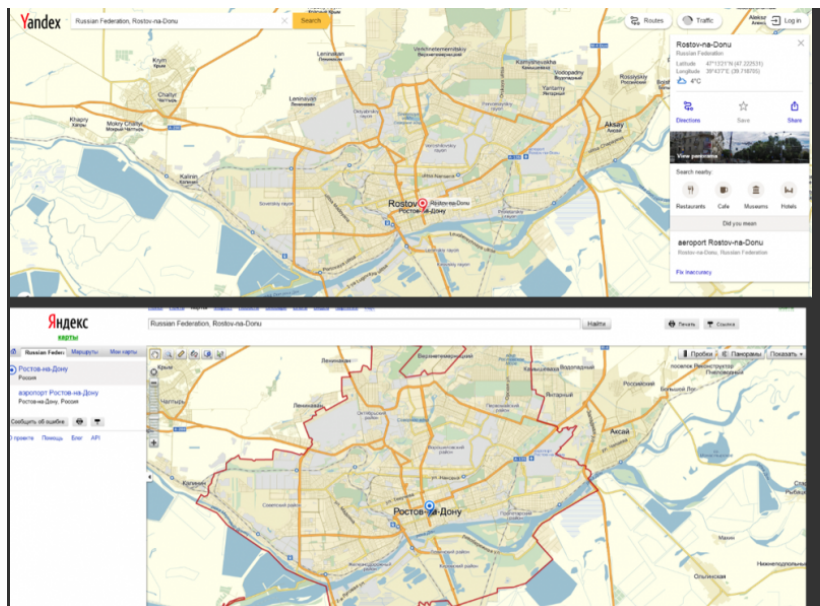
Screenshot from Google Earth for October 19, 2013.

Yandex

The Russian search engine Yandex operates a [mapping service](#) similar to Google Maps, including

road maps, satellite imagery, and selective coverage of street-level imagery.

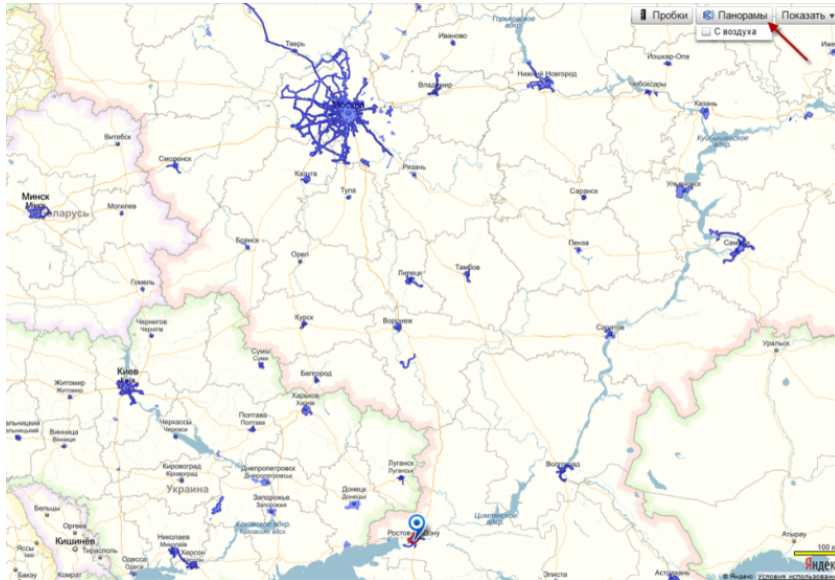
There are two ways to access Yandex maps—through maps.yandex.ru and through maps.yandex.com. As you'd expect, the latter is in English, and the former in Russian. They are largely the same, but the layouts are slightly different.



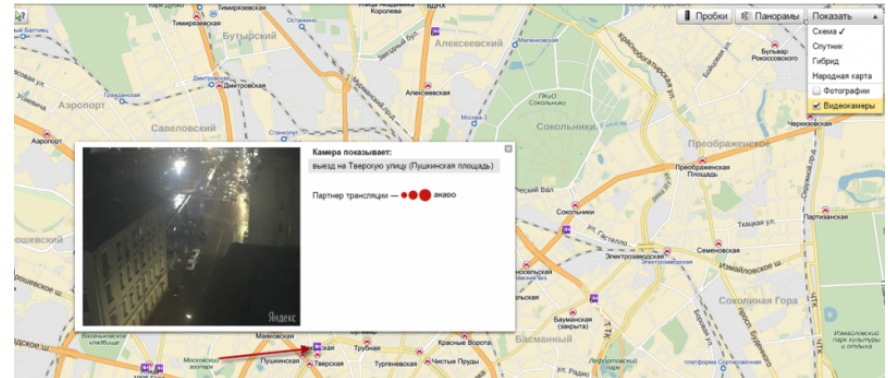
Top: English Yandex, Bottom: Russian Yandex.

The top version is the English site, and the bottom is Russian. For the remainder of this tutorial, the Russian version (bottom) will be used, but the English version is roughly equivalent and the instructions should mostly translate over.

Instead of “street view,” Yandex uses what it calls the “Panorama” view for street-level imagery of certain cities in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan (Astana, Almaty, and Karaganda), and Turkey. As evident in the map below, only fairly large cities and roadways have Panorama imagery available, indicated by the shaded blue areas. You can turn on Panorama imagery by clicking the Panorama (Панорамы) button in the top-right of the page.



A very nifty feature that is not available on Google is livestream videos from locations (most often traffic cameras). After selecting the video-camera option in the top-right corner (Видеокамеры), you can select the purple camera icons on the map (most often in densely populated urban areas) for a livestream of the location. See below with a traffic camera in central Moscow:



Like Google Maps, Yandex can place geolocated photos from users onto their maps, giving you additional views of a location from the ground.



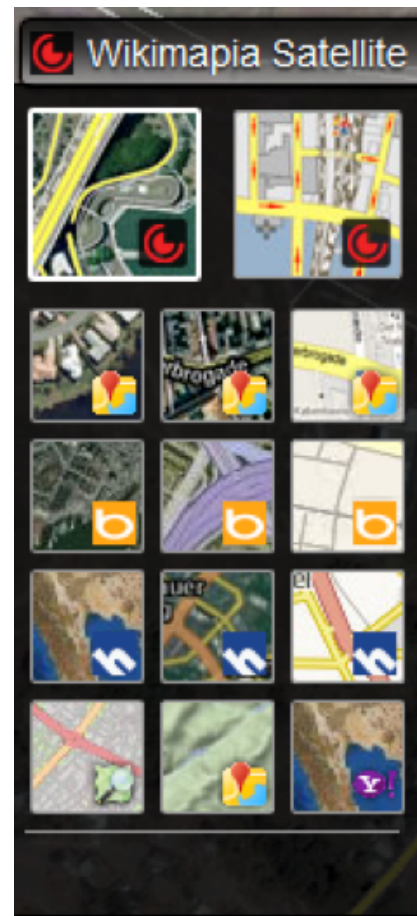
In the above screenshot, the title of the photograph (which is “Untitled,” без названия) is available, along with the user responsible for uploading the

image (bottom-left red box), and the date of the photograph's upload (bottom-right red box). Turn on the photographs overlaid on the map by selecting Photographs (фотографии) in the top-right corner.

The Yandex satellite imagery, which is unique from the Google Maps (DigitalGlobe) satellite imagery, can also be accessed through [Wikimapia](https://wikimapia.org/).

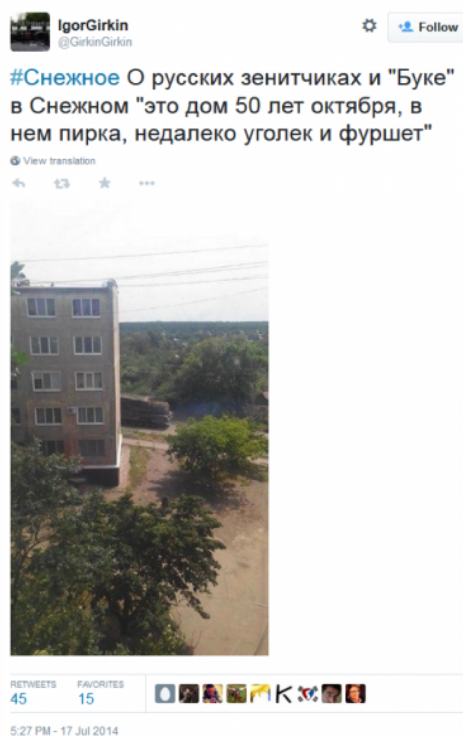
Wikimapia

[Wikimapia](https://wikimapia.org/) combines an array of satellite services with user-inputted descriptions of locations, providing an impressive array of professional (satellite) and local (descriptions) information.



The available satellite imagery can be viewed in the top-right corner, including Google (DigitalGlobe) imagery, Google Terrain, Bing, Yandex, Here, OSM (Open Street Map), and Yahoo.

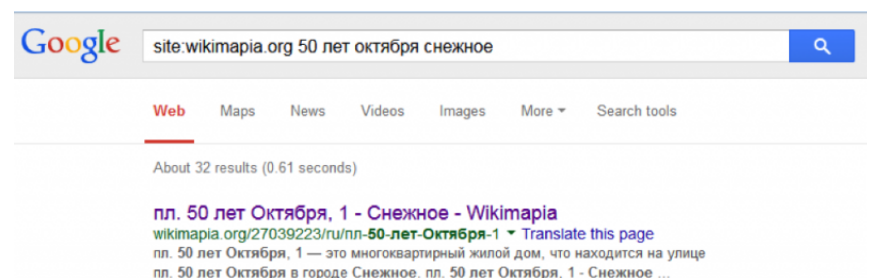
[This tweet](#) was posted a few hours before the MH17 disaster, showing a Buk anti-aircraft system supposedly in the town of Snezhnoe. By using Wikimapia, we can locate some of the landmarks mentioned in the tweet and verify the location of the image.



The five locations mentioned in the tweet above are reproduced below with English translations:

1. в Снежном: in Snezhnoe
2. дом 50 лет октября: house/building 50 Years of October
3. в нем пирка: in it is pirka
4. уголек: ugolek (small piece of coal)
5. фуршет: furshet (buffet, smorgasbord)

We can assume that the person posting this is not saying that the Buk is near a buffet of food or a little piece of coal, so we need to do some more digging to find the context of the words. The search function within Wikimapia is not very useful, so it is often better to search the site using Google, but restricting our results to those on Wikimapia by using the “site: search” function.

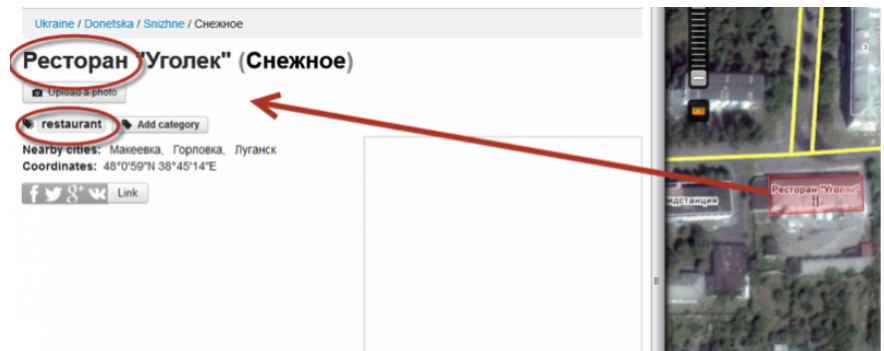


By following the first result, we find that “50 Years of October” is a street in the center of Snezhnoe. From Wikimapia, we can search the nearby

location and look for the other landmarks mentioned in the tweet: **Ugolek**, **Firshet**, and **Pirka**.



Two of these are immediately clear on both sides of 50 Years of October (the street that runs vertical between the two landmarks). After clicking their entries on Wikimapia, we find that Furshet is a supermarket and Ugolek is a restaurant.

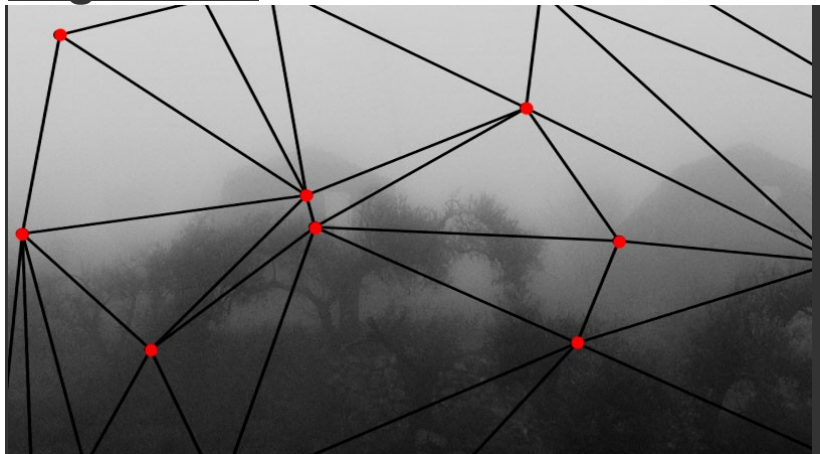


We do not know where Pirka is (though if you looked long and hard enough, you would see it is a shop in one of the apartment buildings in the area), but identifying four of the five landmarks—the city, street, and two locations—is enough to focus our search on this area for traces of the Buk in the photograph. From here, it's a matter of geolocation and matching angles, trees, and the road in the photograph.

For those wondering: the Buk was indeed in Snezhnoe, photographed approximately 3-4 hours before MH17 was shot down. The photograph was traced back a building on 50 Years of October, facing towards the apartment building on Karapetyana 13a.

Whatever a photograph's location, there are always geolocation options—whether it's a livestream from the street, or a blurry satellite photo from 2012. Using the resources described in this guide, you should be able to find the most accurate and helpful image available for locations in Russia and Ukraine, whether it's from Google, Yandex, Wikimapia, or sites less useful for Russia and Ukraine, such as [TerraServer](#) or [Bing Maps](#).

Triangulating Sources to Thin the Fog of War



Ghost village, by Christos Tsoumplekas. January 6, 2012. Ano Simi, Crete, Greece. CC 2.0. Edited by Kevin Rothrock.

The war in eastern Ukraine was the first European war to take place in the ubiquitous presence of the Internet, documenting nearly every aspect of the war as it played out. The conflict's ideological battleground unfolded online, making tragic events into fodder for propaganda (for Internet users in both camps of the war).

As historians and investigators look back at the fighting, it will be vital to collect as many views as

possible on individual events, in order to discern fact from fiction. This guide will show you how to find pro-separatist, pro-Ukrainian, and independent-observer (OSCE) reports for specific days, using as a case study the January 13, 2015, shelling attack on a civilian bus near the town of Volnovakha, which resulted in the deaths of 12 passengers.

Contents

- [Separatist dispatches](#)
- [Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council](#)
- [The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#)
- [Thinning the 'fog of war'](#)

Separatist dispatches

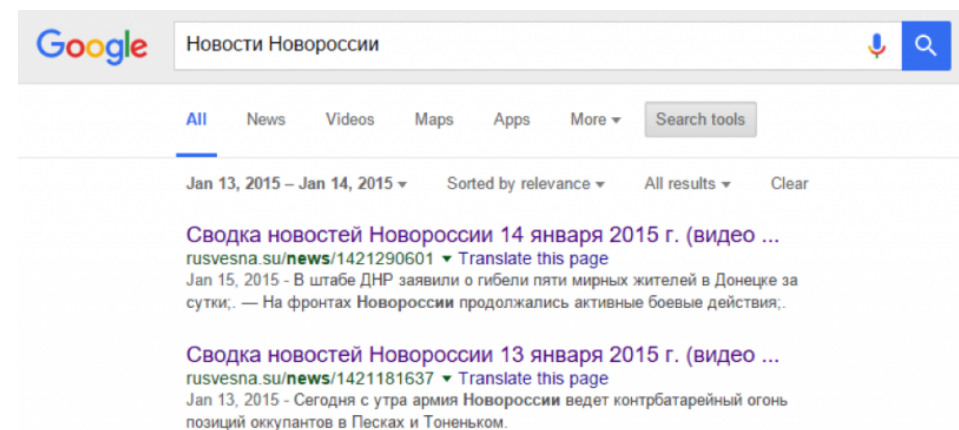
Much like the Ukrainian government, various separatist groups issue dispatches that summarize recent battles and military activity. Also like dispatches from Kyiv, these should not be trusted without extensive verification through outside sources. Below is a list of some of the most popular separatist dispatches, most of which have information going back to the first half of 2014.

Many of these dispatches duplicate the same information, but they may also contain additional photos, videos, and context:

- [Сводки от ополчения Новороссии](#) (Dispatches from the militia of Novorossiia) Vkontakte group. This post was previously called Сводки от Стрелкова Игоря Ивановича (Dispatches from Igor Ivanovich Strelkov), containing dispatches supposedly from the infamous separatist commander himself, though the texts were actually authored by others. Some of the posts were taken from messages that Strelkov (Igor Girkin) supposedly posted through other channels.
- [Новости Новороссии](#) (News of Novorossiia)
- [Русская Весна](#) (Russian Spring)
- [Новости Донецкой Республики](#) (News of the Donetsk Republic)
- [Новороссия Информационное Агентство](#) (Novorossiia Information Agency)
- [Военные сводки с Юго-Восточного фронта](#) (War dispatches from the Southeastern front)

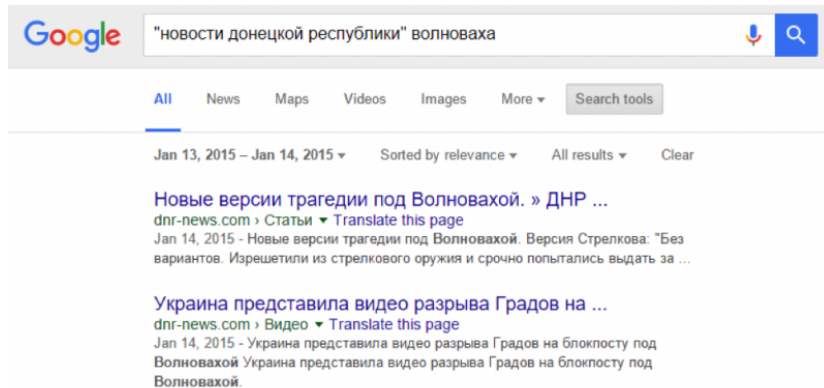
- [Донбасс Центр](#) (Donbass Center), with dispatches from a variety of sources, including journalists, specific officials, and individual militants.

Searching for one of these outlets (Новости Новороссии) with the date parameters of the day of and after the attack, we find dispatches on pro-separatist RusVesna.su for the two days:



For the [January 13 report](#), the separatist dispatch says, “The armed forces of Ukraine shot up a passenger bus with peaceful citizens at a checkpoint near Volnovakha. 10 people are dead, 13 are wounded.” More information can be found searching for another of these dispatches—the

News of the Donetsk Republic—with the data parameters and the keyword “Volnovakha” in Russian:



[In the first result](#), the news site provides quotations from separatist commander Igor Girkin (Strelkov) and pro-Russian/pro-separatist blogger Boris Rozhin (“colonelcassad”). Girkin accused Ukraine of “attempting to hide the truth” and said that there were “clear signs of bullet wounds from small caliber weapons,” contradicting Ukrainian claims that separatists shelled the checkpoint with artillery. Rozhin sees a more complicated plot, saying that there should be “several craters” at the site and not just one near the bus, and that Ukraine fired a single shell at the passenger bus to blame separatists for the attack. In a real

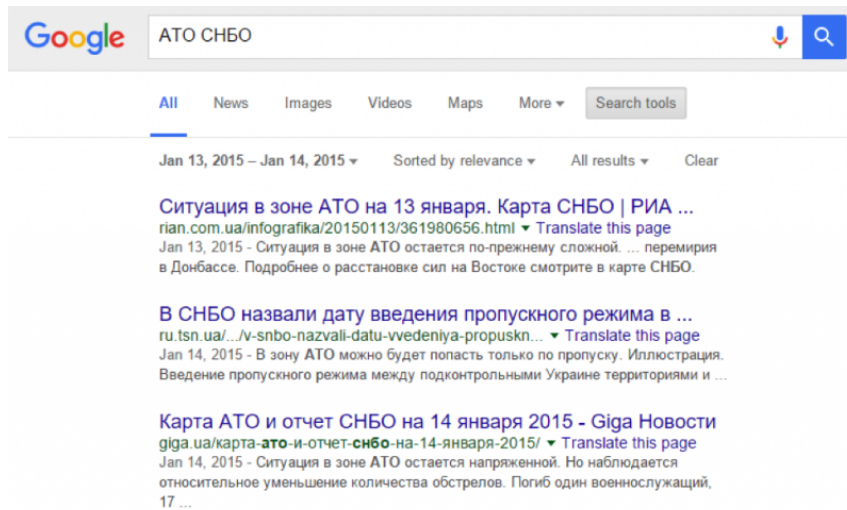
separatist attack with a Grad artillery system, as Rozhin's argument goes, there would be dozens of shells fired at the location.

Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council

The Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (CHBO, or NSDC) releases regular dispatches regarding casualty figures, the locations of battles, and sightings of Russian and separatist military equipment in eastern Ukraine. You can access these from various Ukrainian news sites, including the video dispatches that usually include Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) spokesperson Andrey Lysenko. Like the separatist dispatches, the information contained in these NSDC and ATO dispatches should not be taken at face value and should always be verified with additional sources.

To find a situation map or dispatch for a particular day, Google the phrase “ATO ЧНБО,” plus the date, or change the Google search parameters to include only a certain day. The Ukrainian news site [112.ua](#) hosts videos and reports on nearly all of these dispatches. You can also find information

from ATO dispatches and National Security and Defense Council reports on social media, such as NSDC's [English-language Twitter account](#).



The first three results are Ukrainian news reports on the updated maps and situation reports from the Ukrainian NSDC for January 13 and 14, 2015—the day of and after the Volnovakha bus attack.



On the map, the red square denotes Volnovakha, where the bus attack occurred. As we can see, the area is well under Ukrainian control.

Further investigation with searches of Волновиха автобус (Volnovakha bus), using the date parameters of January 13-14, 2015, gives us a tremendous amount of information, as this incident made news headlines for several days in Ukraine and Russia. Shortly after the attack, various

Ukrainian news outlets published a video of the attack from security footage, showing approximately 88 shells fall around the checkpoint, with fire seemingly coming from the northeast in the direction of separatist-held Dokuchaievsk.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE is the only international organization allowed to conduct monitoring in eastern Ukraine, thus making it a valuable resource for independent information about the conflict. The OSCE produces daily updates, along with spot reports on special events, regarding any fighting observed, groups of vehicles spotted, investigations into particular attacks, and other events. The daily OSCE updates can be accessed [here](#), along with the spot reports.

One of the most widely discussed OSCE updates was its [spot report on the Volnovakha bus attack](#), following [a separatist artillery attack near a checkpoint](#). With allegations flying from both Ukraine and separatist forces, the OSCE report was a stabilizing force in the controversy, dismissing

separatist allegations of a landmine triggering the attack or a Ukrainian “false flag” attack against its own checkpoint.

The OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) arrived at the location of the incident at 5:45 p.m. and witnessed the removal of two dead passengers from the bus. The bus had shrapnel damage consistent with a nearby rocket impact, estimated by the SMM to be 12-15 meters from the side of the bus. The SMM visited the Volnovakha hospital where the staff confirmed that 10 persons on the bus were killed instantly, while two died later in the hospital. Another 17 passengers were injured.

The OSCE later confirmed that a Grad rocket, fired from the northeast of Volnovakha, was the source of the attack on the bus. This information corroborates Ukrainian accusations that separatists fired an artillery attack from territory to the northeast of Volnovakha, as seen in the security footage from the checkpoint.

Thinning the 'fog of war'

There is more information about the Volnovakha bus attack than most incidents in the Ukrainian war, as this particular attack drew international outrage and commentary from world leaders. Nevertheless, the same research principles can be applied to study events as minor as an empty town being hit by mortar fire, or as major as the MH17 tragedy. Though the Volnovakha attack was fairly unambiguous in culpability, not all incidents are so clear, as Ukrainian sources often compete with separatist spokespersons to produce unreliable reports. Even with the flood of wartime information created and made accessible by the Internet (dispatches, videos, photographs, and eyewitness accounts), the fog of war is still thick. But it's not impenetrable.

How to Comb Russia's TV News



Combing Russia's television news networks.
Image: Kevin Rothrock.

According to [survey research](#) by the Levada Center, the vast majority of Russians (85 percent) say they watch television to learn about the country's news. While less than half (41 percent) say they also trust the news they learn from TV, it still inspires twice at least as much confidence than any of its competitors. When conducting online open-source research in Russian, finding and evaluating television reports is often just as important as combing social media and online news sources. This guide explains how to evaluate TV news sources and navigate television networks' online

video archives, in order to compare coverage of specific events.

Contents

- [Channel One \(Первый канал\)](#)
- [Russia 1 \(Россия 1\)](#)
- [Russia 24 \(Россия 24\)](#)
- [NTV \(НТВ\)](#)
- [Zvezda \(Телеканал звезда\)](#)
- [LifeNews \(ЛайфНьюс\)](#)
- [TV Rain \(Дождь\)](#)

Channel One (Первый канал)

This is the most-watched channel in Russia, airing a variety of news, entertainment, and sports programs. The channel is state-owned and has a generally pro-government bias. For open-source research, the most relevant programming is the popular “Vremya” (Время) nightly news program, which has a weekly segment by the infamous pundit Dmitry Kiselyov. A livestream of the channel can be viewed [here](#).

The fastest way to locate particular pieces of Channel One's news coverage is by searching

through its easy-to-use [video archive](#), sorted by date (if you cannot read the months, check a [reference guide here](#) from MasterRussian.com). The archive goes back to 1999, providing a wealth of easily accessible information.

Архив новостей / [Архив выпусков](#)

ЧЕТВЕРГ - 28 января 2016

21:44
Леонид Волков стал чемпионом в международных состязаниях по танцам в аэротрубе
[смотреть\(263\)](#) [добавить\(36\)](#)

21:43
Коллекция Ульяны Сергеенко представлена во французской столице
[смотреть\(2517\)](#) [добавить\(237\)](#) [добавить\(1807\)](#)

21:37
Члены общественного Совета при МВД провели выездное заседание на Казанском вокзале
[смотреть\(907\)](#) [добавить\(13\)](#)

21:35
Из-за оттепели ходить по улицам городов в европейской части России стало опаснее
[смотреть\(2637\)](#) [добавить\(1217\)](#) [смотреть\(1376\)](#) [добавить\(13\)](#)

21:34

ПОГОДА
Москва и область, 29 января, ночью
на дорогах гололедица, облачно, снег, мокрый снег, температура 0..2°, по области -2..3°, ветер западной четверти 5-10 м/с, неслышны порывы 12-17 м/с
[Подробнее о погоде в вашем регионе](#)

Поиск в новостях

< Декабрь Январь 2016 Февраль >

Пн	Вт	Ср	Чт	Пт	Сб	Вс
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Additionally, you can search through Channel One's YouTube channel [here](#).

Russia 1 (Россия 1)

This is the second-most-watched channel in Russia, airing news, entertainment, sports, documentaries, and other programming. Like Channel One, the channel is state-owned and the news coverage is rarely, if ever, critical of the Kremlin. Each news segment's title contains the word “Vesti” (Вести), including “Vesti,” “Vesti on

Saturday” (Вести в субботу), “Vesti at 8:00 p.m.” (Вести в 20:00), and so on. A livestream of the channel can be viewed [here](#).

The website makes it very easy to search for news segments, [categorizing them by date](#) and by [specific program](#). After clicking on a Vesti segment, you can search by a calendar (календарь) to find a news broadcast on a specific date, going back to 2012.

ДРУГИЕ ВЫПУСКИ / всего 1705 выпусков

Выберите способ отображения

☐ список ☒ календарь

← ОКТЯБРЬ 2014

НОВЕБРЬ 2014 →

Пн	Вт	Ср	Чт	Пт	Сб	Вс	Пн	Вт	Ср	Чт	Пт	Сб	Вс
29	30	01	02	03	04	05	27	28	29	30	31	01	02
06	07	08	09	10	11	12	03	04	05	06	07	08	09
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
27	28	29	30	31	01	02	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
03	04	05	06	07	08	09	01	02	03	04	05	06	07

Additionally, Russia 1 has numerous regional channels. For their video broadcasts, search for Россия 1 with the region or city name—for example, enter “Россия 1 Ярославль” to find the station's Yaroslavl branch. Googling this phrase

will bring the [official television station's website](#) and the [YouTube channel for the station](#), giving us an archive of nearly all of their local news broadcasts.

Russia 24 (Россия 24)

This is a 24-hour news channel and the sister channel to Russia 1. The channel was named “Vesti” (Вести) until 2010, and still retains the same URL of Vesti.ru. A livestream of the channel can be viewed [here](#).

As with Russia 1, there are vast video archives for the news broadcasts for this channel, accessible by category and show [here](#). You can filter the results by date after searching a term (click the magnifying glass in top-right corner), then selecting a date range.

РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ ПОИСКА

Вы искали:

Тип материала:

☐ Новости и статьи

☐ Видео

Найти

Диапазон дат:

за весь период

до

Январь 2016

Пн	Вт	Ср	Чт	Пт	Сб	Вс
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

16:05
21 января 2016

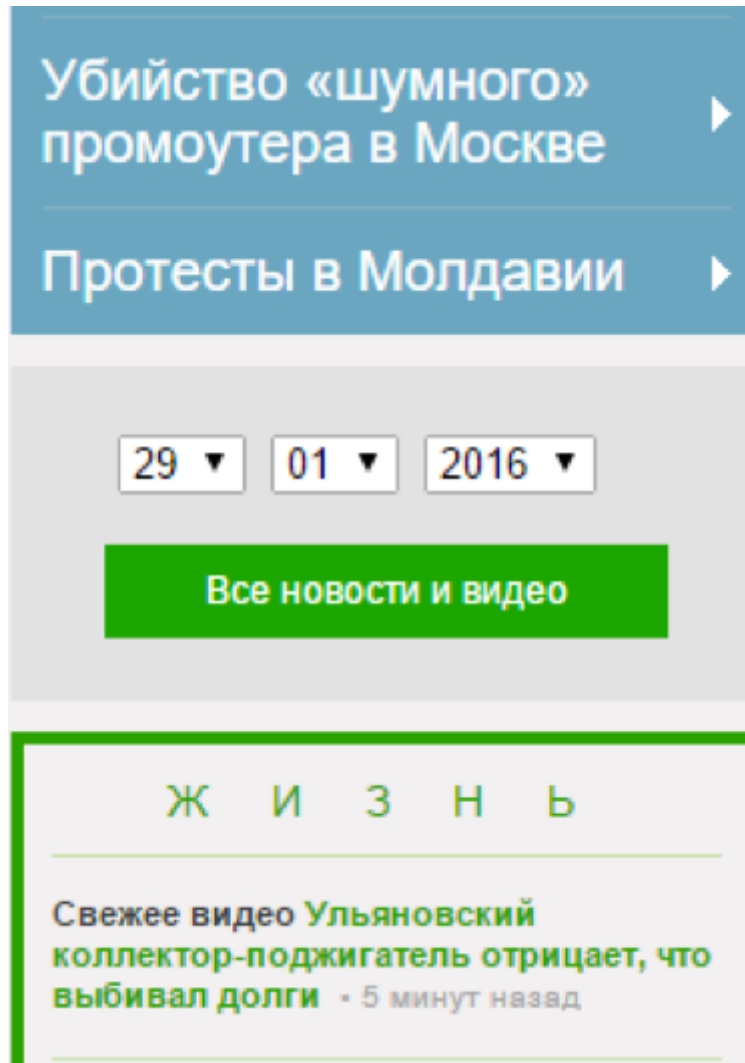
Законопроект о запрете на депутатство внесен в Госдуму

Власть или бизнес. Перед таким выбором могут быть местные администрации и муниципальные службы, предпринимательской деятельностью.

Бизнесменов
сенаторы, главы занимаются

Additionally, Russia 24's vast news broadcast archives are accessible (going back a few years) on its [YouTube channel](#). The programs are filtered on the YouTube channel by theme (such as the more-than-1,000 videos on the “Situation in Ukraine” channel) or by program.

NTV (HTB)



Since its takeover in March 2000 (following Putin's first presidential election win), NTV has been under

the control of Media-Most and, after 2001, Gazprom Media. NTV is nominally independent, but the state has a majority stake in Gazprom, effectively putting the Kremlin in control of the network's major editorial policies.

NTV airs a number of news programs, along with shows, movies, and emotional investigations that often focus on crime. Its news is slanted towards the government line, and it's often more sensationalist than Russia 1 or Channel One. A livestream of the channel can be viewed [here](#).

The easiest way to navigate NTV's broadcast archive is by filtering its news page. From the "news" (новости) page, scroll down to find a small segment on the right-hand part of the page showing the date.

After selecting the desired date, any news segments that aired on that day will appear. When searching by key word, there is no way to search within a date range, but the results are ordered chronologically by default. You can also search through the daily news programs of NTV

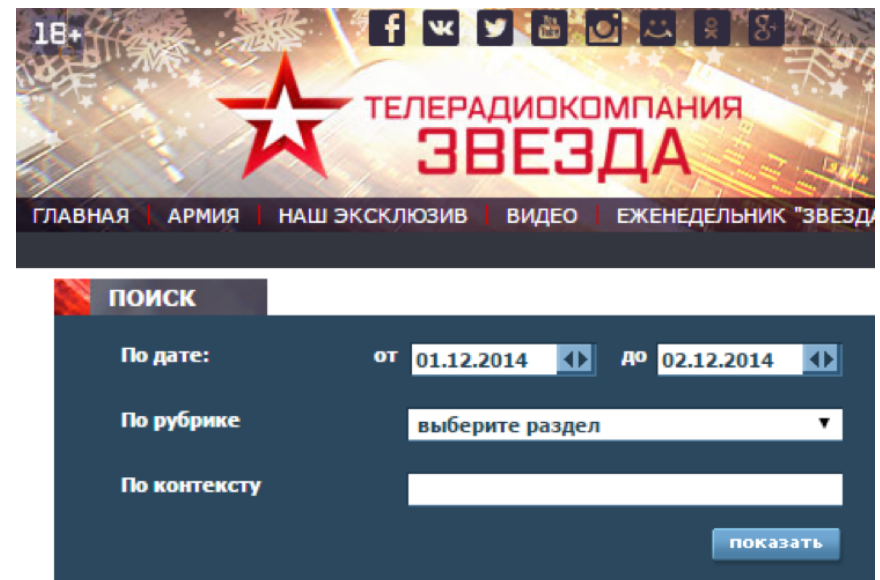
(“Сегодня” and “Итоги дня”) using NTV's [YouTube channel](#).

Zvezda (Телеканал звезда)

This is the Russian Defense Ministry's television network. As you might imagine, Zvezda airs programs that focus on the Russian military, including documentaries, news programs, and war movies. The news itself is very pro-Kremlin, and sometimes it publishes and airs unverified content from fringe websites, such as a [story](#) claiming that “thousands” of ISIS fighters arrived in Odessa in November 2015. A livestream of the channel can be viewed [here](#).

Zvezda’s YouTube channel with programming is available [here](#) (and the news-only channel is [here](#)). Unfortunately, the search function on the Zvezda website to find specific news segments is cumbersome, but you can still navigate it with some effort. Go to their search page and type anything into the field in the top-right of the page (which will say “поиск”). This will bring up the search parameters. When searching for a particular date, you must choose the date you wish

to search (the first one, after “от”) and the day after the desired date (after “до”). For example, if you wish to search for a news segment on December 1, 2014, the graphic below show the needed search parameters (along with a key word in Russian after “По контексту”):



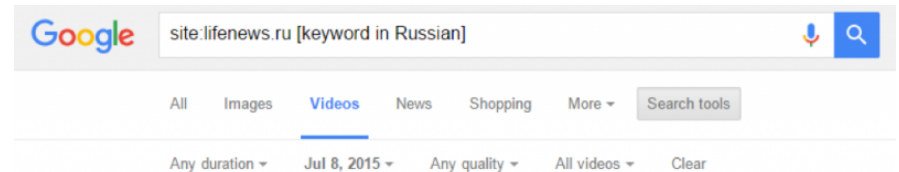
Alternatively, you may find success searching within Zvezda’s YouTube channel, avoiding the awkward search interface of its native website.

LifeNews (ЛайфНьюс)

This is a privately-held television channel that has gained quite a reputation throughout the Ukrainian crisis as sensationalist and loose with facts.

LifeNews—owned by Aram Gabrelyanov and said to be close with Russia's security services—prides itself at being the first to report news (often to the detriment of the [truth](#) and [taste](#)). Since the cooling of the Ukrainian crisis, LifeNews has gone back to focusing on sensationalist stories and a higher dose of celebrity news than Russia 1 or Channel One. You can watch LifeNews' livestream [here](#).

Of all of the television channels outlined in this guide, the broadcast archives of LifeNews are probably the most difficult to navigate. On the network's website, the search function only allows keyword search, without date parameters. You may have better luck searching through their [YouTube channel](#), or trying focused searches through Google Video. For example, the search parameters below would search for all videos on LifeNews' website that appeared on July 8, 2015, that also contain a keyword of choice:



TV Rain (Дождь)

Lastly, there is the independent, generally anti-Kremlin television network TV Rain, which moved to a subscription model after most cable carriers dropped it from coverage. The station often hosts pro-Western, anti-Kremlin guests, and occasionally grants airtime to pro-Kremlin figures and even some state officials. The network is said to have ties to Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's circle of influence. While the great majority of the channel's programming is news, there are also some entertainment programs. A livestream can be viewed [here](#) (with a paid subscription).

The channel's archives are very easy to navigate using its archive [here](#). For example, the search below for November ("Ноябрь") 10, 2014, yields 52 results, including 17 broadcast segments.

Архив

Год Месяц День

Введите поисковый запрос

Искать

Найдено: Все (52) Видео (17) Новости (35) Программы (0) Сюжеты (0) Ведущие и авторы (0)
Блоги (0) Фотогалереи (0) Гости (3)

While access to some results may require a subscription, the great majority of the archived broadcast segments is accessible to everyone. You can also access the channel's broadcasts on its [YouTube channel](#).

There are, of course, additional channels in Russia producing news coverage—such as REN TV (РЕН ТВ), Channel 5 (Пятый канал), and RBC (РБК)—but for most purposes, the channels outlined above will be more than sufficient for research, in conjunction with local television channels. Unlike American and some European media outlets, Russian television channels are often meticulous in publicly cataloging their broadcasts, sometimes going back over a decade. When conducting open-source research on nearly any event in Russia—a protest, natural disaster, crime, or any other

topic—these archived broadcasts often provide incredible amounts of information, along with a window into the source that the vast majority of Russians rely on for their news.

How to Learn More About the Big Wigs and Public Officials in Russia and Ukraine



Image edited by Kevin Rothrock.

There are numerous free and open information portals and databases available for researching individuals in Ukraine and Russia, whether you are investigating a public figure or a private individual. Information about ordinary Russians and Ukrainians can be hard to find on these databases, and sometimes the best way to locate data about such people is to look on social networks, as detailed in a [previous installment](#) to this guide. This eighth and final entry in RuNet Echo's guide to doing open-source research on the RuNet looks at

the portals and databases you can use to learn more about public figures and big-wig individuals, even if you have little or no knowledge of Russian or Ukrainian.

Contents

- [Information on Organizations](#)
- [Nomer.org](#)
- [Declarations.com.ua](#)
- [Missing Persons](#)

Information on Organizations

A handful of websites provide information about organizations registered in Russia, including non-profits, LLCs, and other companies. The website SBIS.ru is one of the best available online resources, providing information about the individuals who hold leadership positions in these bodies and the owners of the organizations. SBIS relies on [public data](#) for each category of information. For example, the “Court records” section (Суды) derives its information from the Federal Arbitration Court of the Russian Federation.

To find out what the organizational affiliations of a specific individual are, search for that person's name (with patronymic, if possible) using Google with the search parameter of “site:sbis.ru,” restricting the results to this site. For example, when searching for the Russian basketball player Andrei Kirilenko, some of the results are clearly tied to him, including details about Kirilenko serving as the president of the Russian Basketball Federation. If you speak Russian, most of this information will be fairly clear, though a bit thick in bureaucratic language. If you do not speak Russian, the categories of information are detailed below.

sbis.ru Информация получена из официальных источников и дана в ограниченном виде. Чтобы получить полную информацию, пожалуйста, нажмите в бланке бланк или отправьте заявку.

РФБ, ООО ОБЩЕРОССИЙСКАЯ ОБЩЕСТВЕННАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ "РОССИЙСКАЯ ФЕДЕРАЦИЯ БАСКЕТБОЛА"

Name of organization

Индивидуальное имя, имя
Кириленко Андрей Геннадьевич

ИНН 7704058487
КПП 770401001
ОГРН 102770034533
ОКПО 00311616

Translations of codes (in order)
Taxpayer identification number
Tax registration reason code
Primary state registration number
Russian National Nomenclator of Businesses and Organisations

Действует с 15.11.1996 **Organization active since...**

Москва г, наб. Лужнецкая, д.8, кон.52, 119270

Address and phone number of organization
(495) 6370543

Выручка Earnings
Недостаточно данных для построения графика

Владельцы Owners and amount of money invested
Нет данных об участии в уставном капитале

Суды Court records
Нет данных об участии в качестве истца
Нет данных об участии в качестве ответчика

Прибыль Profits
Недостаточно данных для построения графика

Связанные лица Connected organizations
ФБ, Фонд
Еще 37 организаций

Надежность Reliability
По общим признакам
Финансовое состояние
Платежеспособность
Репутация участника торгов
Аудиторская практика

Tenders and state contracts
Торги и госконтракты
Участие в
Выигран
Госконтракты

Стоимость Costs
Недостаточно данных для построения графика

Nomer.org

The website Nomer.org holds a vast amount of information, but its results are often outdated, full of gaps, and somewhat unreliable. Regardless, if you are looking for information about an individual in Russia or Ukraine, you may find some success with this site.

Nomer.org hosts a database with the addresses and dates of births of millions of Ukrainians, though much of this information is outdated and now incorrect. From the site <http://nomer.org.net/allukraina/>, you can input information into the green fields to refine your search:

Вся Украина - жители

Last name **First name** **Patronymic** **Phone number** **City** **Street** **Building number** **Apt. number** **Search**

Фамил Имя Отчел тел нас. п ул. дом кв Найти

Testing this out, we can input the name of the Ukrainian president, Petro Alekseyevich Poroshenko. In this case, Nomer.org returns accurate information:

Фамилия Имя Отчество	тел	дата рожд.	нас. пункт	ул.	дом	корп	кв
ПОРОШЕНКО ПЕТР АЛЕКСЕЕВИЧ	0	1965-09-26	М.КИЇВ	ГРУШЕВСЬКОГО	9	0	37

From left to right, the information given is the person's name, listed telephone number (Poroshenko does not have a listed number), date of birth, city of residence, street, street number, building number, and apartment number.

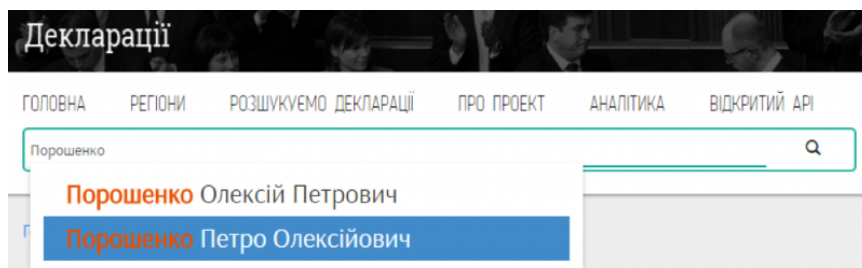
Nomer.org also hosts a limited directory of Russian citizens, accessible by clicking the correct city or region on the website's [main page](#). Also available is a limited directory of the license plates in [Yekaterinburg](#), [Novosibirsk](#), [Rostov-on-Don](#), and [Moscow](#). To find information in these vehicle directories, either search within the Nomer.org search engine, or use Google, by searching the person's name, address, license plate number, or telephone number, adding the search parameters "site:nomer.org" or "site:nomer-org.net."

Declarations.com.ua

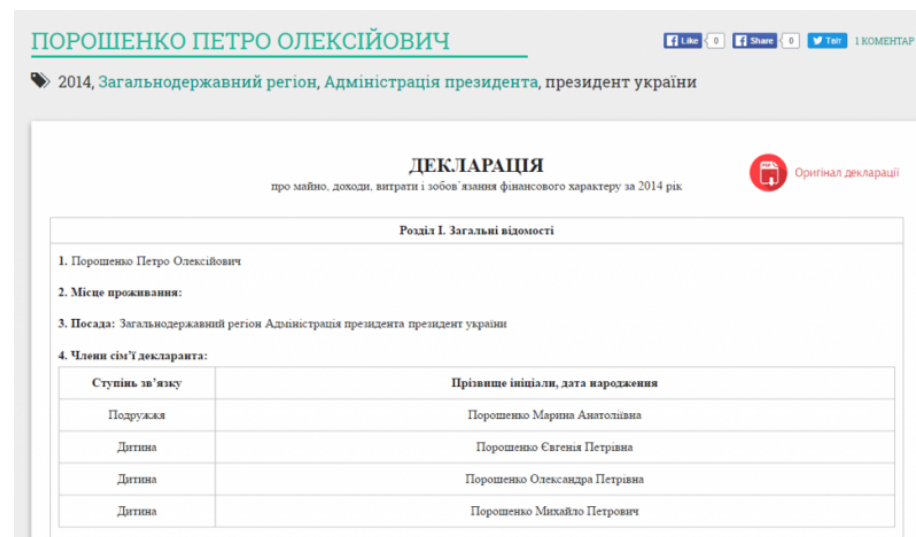
A post-Maidan anti-corruption law requires all Ukrainian public officials—including legislators, judges, prosecutors, and others—to declare their incomes. However, the law does not specify that

these income declarations must be published electronically (although [a new law](#) passed in March 2016 will require officials to publish electronic declarations—*Global Voices*). That's where the Declarations.com.ua project, ran by journalist and anti-corruption activist Denis Bigus and his colleagues, comes in. Relying on crowdsourced efforts, the site provides electronic copies of officials' paper income declarations.

Unlike the sites previously described in this guide, Declarations.com.ua is written in Ukrainian, not Russian. It is nevertheless quite easy to navigate and has an intuitive interface. To search for an individual, enter their name (in Ukrainian, but the name may be recognized in Russian, as well) into the search bar, and choose their name if they come up in the auto-complete. Below, we'll try searching for Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko:



This search produces three results: Poroshenko income declarations for 2011 (when he was a presidential candidate), in 2013 (when he served in the parliament), and in 2014 (by which time he assumed the presidency). By clicking any of these records, we see his digitized income declaration, along with a scan of the original document (accessible via the red PDF button in the upper right).



While this project is ambitious and quite useful, there are obvious limitations: Ukrainians without official governmental roles will not be represented in this database, and the database is still incomplete, as there is still an ongoing effort to digitize a massive number of paper records.

Missing Persons

There are two noteworthy websites that allow you to search for missing persons in Russia and Ukraine. The first is a Russian national service called Жди меня (Wait for Me), which can be found at <http://poisk.vid.ru/>. This service is a

partner to [a television show](#) with the same name, which features stories about searches for lost loved ones in Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, and other post-Soviet countries.

To search for a person in the database, go to the Найти человека (Find a Person) option, and then enter the necessary information into the search fields:

Найти человека

Поиск по номеру заявки Поиск по данным искомого:

Поиск по данным искомого:

Поиск по фамилии и имени больше не требует спецсимвола "%". Его следует писать только если Вы не уверены как они пишутся

Фамилия **Last name**

Имя **First name**

Секс **Sex**

☒ ПОЛ ЛЮБОЙ ☐ МУЖ ☐ ЖЕН

ГОД РОЖДЕНИЯ 1960 - 1964 **Year of birth**

СОРТИРОВАТЬ ☒ по фамилии ☐ по дате заявки

Sort by 1) last name 2) date of missing person claim

ОЧИСТИТЬ НАЙТИ

Ukraine's national missing-person database is also quite easy to use. From the [search page](#), input the known information about the person you are searching for:

Прізвище **Last name**

Ім'я **First name**

По батькові **Patronymic**

Опис зовнішності **Description (hair, eye color...)**

Особливі прикмети **Special signs (e.g. tattoos)**

Регіон (орган МВС) **Region**

Стать **Sex**

Дата народження **Date of birth**

Дата зникнення **Date of disappearance**

чоловіча жіноча **Male Female**

(from) (to)

ЗНАЙТИ

* * *

If searching for open-source information about a particular Russian or Ukrainian individual, it's quite possible that you won't be able to find any useful information, aside from the information available [on social networks](#). For most people, the social-network route is by far the most fruitful way to find information about their education, employment, and family history. However, depending on the person's status or importance, it is quite likely that one of these special resources will provide more information, especially if the focus of the investigation concerns financial connections or corruption.

You've Read Our Open-Source Research Guidebook. Now Let's Use It.



You can do it. Image by Kevin Rothrock.

This article is part of a larger guidebook by RuNet Echo to help people learn how to conduct open-source research on the Russian Internet. Explore the [complete guidebook](#) at the special project page.

RuNet Echo has now published eight installments in a [guidebook](#) on conducting open-source research on the Russian Internet. This ninth and final entry takes the tools and instructions we've been studying and applies them to a single case study: the wildfires that caused significant damage to the Siberian city of Chita in 2015.

Contents

- [Finding Photographs and Videos](#)
- [Finding Information From the Ground](#)
- [The View From the Sky](#)
- [Verifying Materials](#)

Finding Photographs and Videos

One of the first logical places to look for footage of last year's wildfires in Siberia is Russian national television. You can search Russia's national and local TV broadcasts by date (in this instance, April 12–16, 2015) on the various networks' websites (as detailed in [this guide](#)).



Figure 1: Screen capture from a national news broadcast.



Figure 2: Screen capture from a local news broadcast.

But this is just a starting point; you shouldn't settle for the footage aired by the media. In these circumstances, it's possible to find more information uploaded to the Internet by ordinary people on the ground. You can do this by searching Instagram and YouTube, among many

other websites and online services. (For conducting such searches on Russian social networks, see [this RuNet Echo instruction guide](#).) By searching some of the hashtags used for this wildfire, such as [#пожары2015](#) (“wildfires 2015”) and [#чита](#) (“Chita,” a large city where there were wildfires), you can find a wealth of materials documenting the disaster.



Figure 3: Photograph from Instagram user “kostas” of a wildfire near Chita, Russia.



Figure 4: Screen capture from a video posted by Instagram user “katya_greeg” of a wildfire, filmed from an apartment building in Chita, Russia.

Video from the Chita wildfire, showing a car driving through the heavy smoke.

Finding Information From the Ground

Photographs and videos are great, but sometimes you need more detailed information from the witnesses and participants of an event from the ground. That’s where searching [local communities](#) and [social networks](#) comes in (see RuNet Echo's detailed guides on

these respective topics). If you do not speak Russian and are struggling to find the right communities, check out our [guide for non-Russian speakers](#) on conducting such research.

Searching for local communities on the Russian social network VKontakte (VK) reveals numerous open groups, including “Overheard in Chita,” “Typical Chita,” “Chita.ru,” and “I’m Looking for You, Chita.” Of these, the first two are especially useful for searching public information.

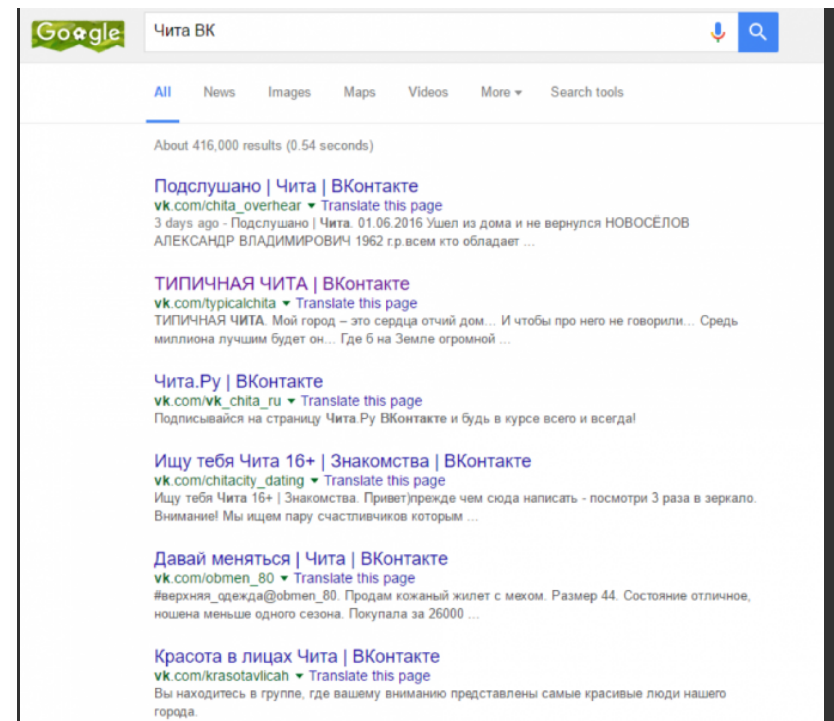


Figure 5: Google search for VK (BK) communities in Chita (Чита).

In Chita, one of the Vkontakte groups with excellent local information about Chita is the Zabaykalsky Kray volunteer firefighters' community page, where you'll find photographs, videos, eyewitness accounts of the wildfires, and other bits of useful information regarding the rescue workers' organizing efforts. If you are researching or reporting on this topic, you could find dozens of

valuable contacts here, as many of the volunteer firefighters active in this group publicly share their phone numbers and email addresses.

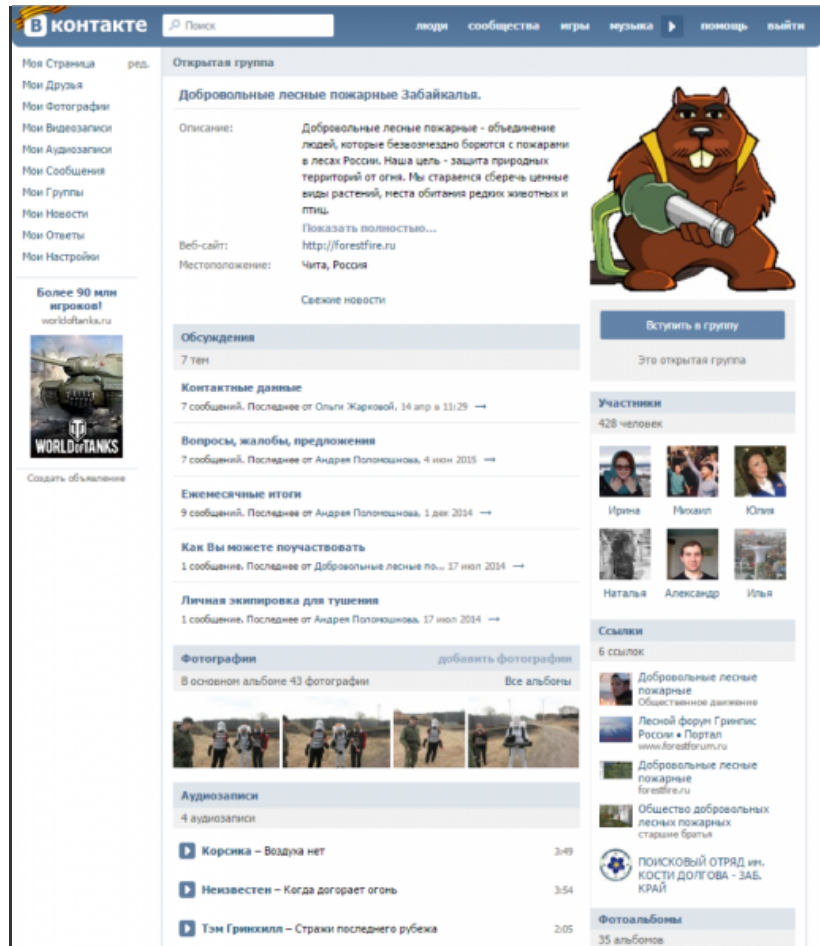


Figure 6: Screenshot from the open Vk group “Volunteer Firefighters of the Zabaikalye.”

The View From the Sky

While we've reviewed several ways to find information produced on the ground, you might also want to examine the situation from above. As detailed in [this guide](#), you can view territory chronologically using services like Google Earth. Looking at the Siberian areas affected by the wildfires, you can see the full extent of the damage. A comparison of a region outside of Chita from May 2014 and then April 2015, shortly after the end of the wildfires, shows some of the areas most affected by the blazes.

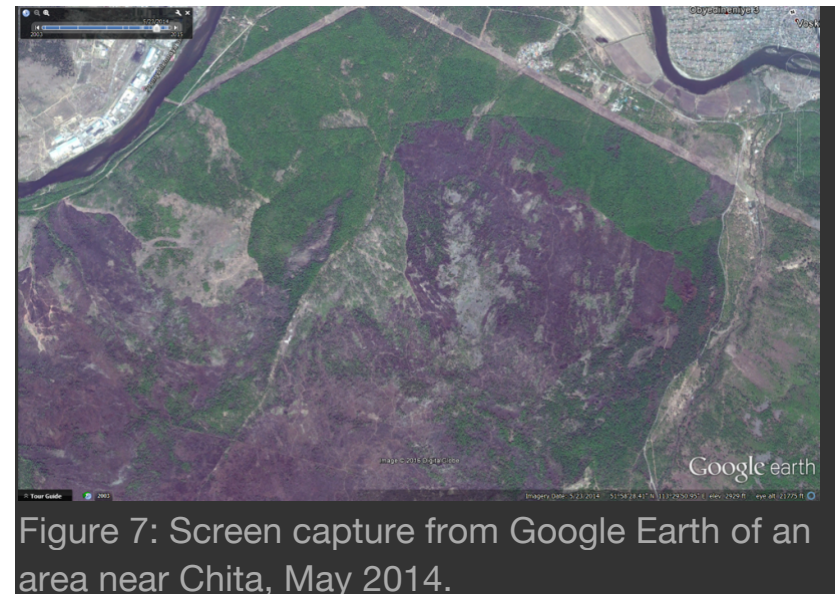


Figure 7: Screen capture from Google Earth of an area near Chita, May 2014.

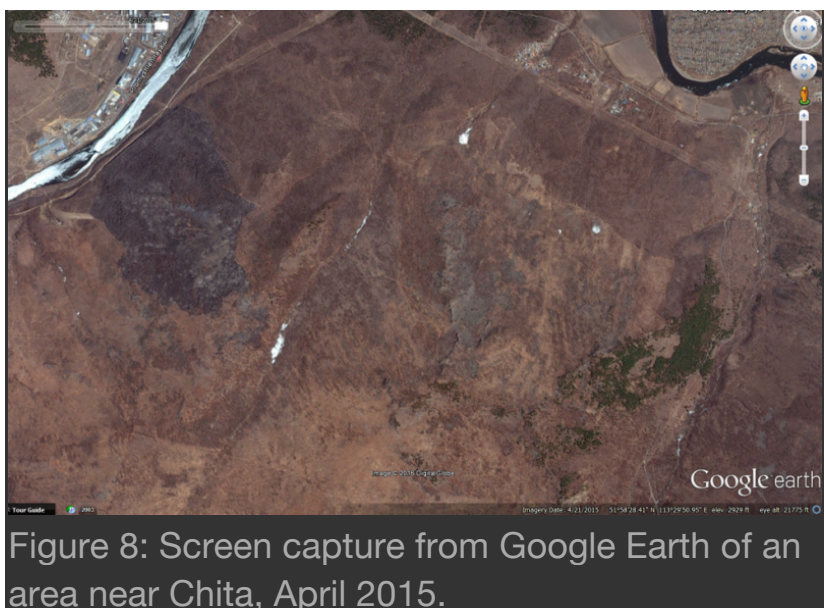


Figure 8: Screen capture from Google Earth of an area near Chita, April 2015.

Verifying Materials

Discovering information is terrific, but it's worthless without proper verification. Often times, open-source research requires more time in verification than discovery. It's important to find all information sources available for each event you're examining (as described in our [guide](#) on research conducted during the conflict in Ukraine).

When vetting sources and potential witnesses, you can sometimes check information about their place of residence and business interests, as detailed

in [this guide](#). Lastly, when you find photographs and videos to use in a report, it's essential that you verify the location of the materials—otherwise, you might end up using phony data. [This guide](#) will walk you through the process of “geolocation”^a(verifying a photograph or video’s location).

For example, this is how we would verify the [photograph below](#), shared by “kocac,” posted during the 2015 Siberian wildfires:

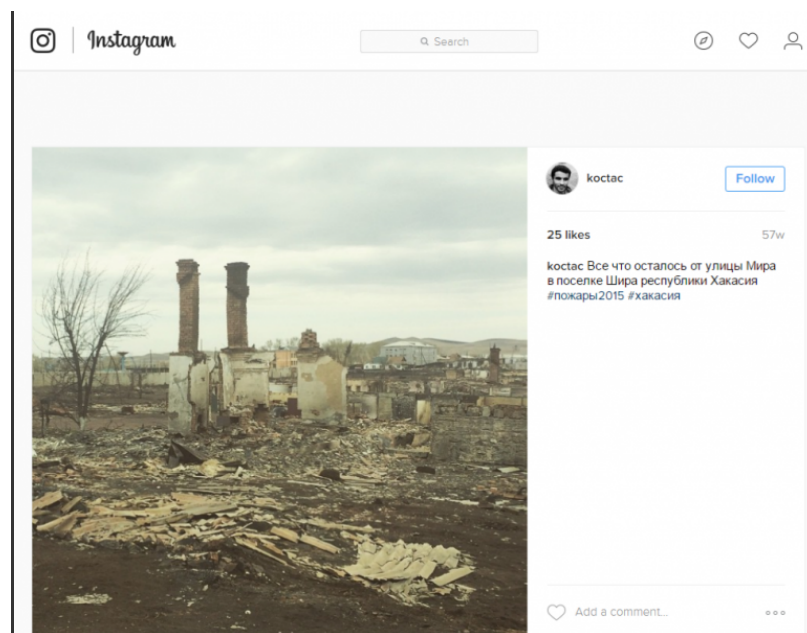


Figure 9: “This is all that remains of Mira Street in the village of Shira in the Republic of Khakassia.

Using the location mentioned in the caption above (Mira Street, Shira, Khakassia, Russia), we can see on Google Earth between July 2013 and April 15, 2015 that the buildings were indeed destroyed after the April 2015 wildfires.



Figure 10: Screen capture from Google Earth of Mira Street in Shira, Khakassia, from July 15, 2013.



Figure 11: Screen capture from Google Earth of Mira Street in Shira, Khakassia, from April 15, 2015.

Upon closer inspection, other features in the photographs are also visible on Google Earth, including a white dormitory in the background, and the elevation of the hills. From all of this, we can confidently confirm the authenticity of the photograph.

* * *

Conducting open-source research on the Russian Internet is not all that different from carrying out such work online in other languages, but there are certainly aspects to the RuNet that it's vital to consider. We at RuNet Echo hope our guidebook can help you bridge some of these differences, and perhaps inspire you to do some digging on your own.